



# American College of Surgeons

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September 21, 2006

The Honorable John Dingell  
2328 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Dingell:

On behalf of the 71,000 Fellows at the American College of Surgeons (College), I would like to thank you for your efforts to address the unsustainable cuts in the Medicare physician payment system scheduled to take effect at the beginning of next year. Through the introduction of the "Patients' Access to Physicians Act" (H.R. 5916), you have taken an important step towards reversing the 5.1 percent in Medicare payment cuts that threaten beneficiary access to quality health care.

The College continues to call on Congress to repeal the flawed sustainable growth rate (SGR) methodology used to calculate physician reimbursement through Medicare. There is wide agreement that the SGR methodology should be replaced with a formula that more accurately reflects the rising costs of providing patients with quality health care, but a permanent solution to this problem remains elusive due to competing budgetary concerns. This has resulted in short-term remedies being passed by Congress to avert pending cuts over the past four years, and due to the cumulative nature of the SGR these short-term fixes have resulted in future scoring challenges. If Congress fails to act soon, Medicare payments to physicians in general will be cut more than 5 percent, while surgeons in particular face additional cuts due to other payment changes.

Your legislation is a positive step towards confronting the pending cuts that threaten to undermine the Medicare payment system. We look forward to working with you on a remedy for these debilitating problems, and look forward to working with you in an effort to enact lasting reforms that will ensure that our nations Medicare beneficiaries have access to quality surgical care for years to come.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS  
Executive Director

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