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September 10, 1999

The Honorable Charlie Norwood
The Honorable John Dingell
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Norwood and Dingell:

On behalf of the American Heart Association, I applaud your introduction of H.R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act, which includes the key patient protections we have identified as important to insuring quality health care for heart disease and stroke patients. As you know, our patient protection principles include:

- guaranteeing timely access to and payment for emergency room care
- ensuring access to specialists who are trained to care for people with diseases, people of certain age groups or people with other specialized health needs
- establishing a timely appeals process, so patients can quickly get an independent assessment of whether or not a plan has made the appropriate coverage decision
- requiring health plans to disclose information about the plan and its policies
- banning financial incentives that encourage providers to withhold care or deny referrals
- prohibiting "gag clauses" that limit what treatment information providers can share with patients
- ensuring access to routine patient services for participants in clinical trials

Together, these provisions will not only improve the quality of health care, but also strengthen patient confidence in the health care system. Your inclusion of these principles in H.R. 2723 demonstrates your continuing commitment to protecting patients and improving the quality of health care in America.

The American Heart Association looks forward to floor action on H.R. 2723 and thanks you for your hard work on this vital issue.

Sincerely,

Lynn A. Smaha, M.D., Ph.D.
President