



November 6, 2009

Speaker Nancy Pelosi  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232, US Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madame Speaker:

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO), representing more than 10,000 radiation oncology medical professionals who treat more than 1 million Americans with cancer each year, applauds your leadership and commitment to reform America's health care system and to scrutinize the impact of physician self-referral for radiation oncology services in the Affordable Health Care for America Act (HR 3962).

ASTRO remains committed to working with Congress and President Obama to ensure that comprehensive health care reform is passed quickly and provides cancer patients with coverage and access to important radiation oncology services. Radiation oncologists are deeply troubled by the increasing number of cancer patients, both insured and uninsured, for whom economic pressures are forcing to delay or forgo life-saving treatments. We support your efforts to implement reforms that protect cancer patients, such as proposals to expand coverage by providing subsidies to lower-income individuals and insurance market reforms that ban pre-existing conditions and limits on annual and lifetime benefits. These reforms will have a significantly positive impact on the lives of cancer patients and survivors.

We also agree that studying the perverse incentives and impact on health care costs associated with physician self-referral should be included in health care reform. We believe these self-referral arrangements in radiation oncology are of significant concern because increased utilization driven by financial incentives is regarded as one of the major drivers of escalating Medicare expenditures. While we have anecdotal evidence that business arrangements involving the self-referral of radiation therapy services are compromising the quality of care and limiting treatment options for cancer patients, no empirical data exists on self-referral and radiation therapy. We wholeheartedly agree that the proposed Government Accountability Office study authorized in Section 1451 would address this gap in knowledge in a transparent manner.

We also support the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act of 2009 (HR 3961) and look forward to working with you to create a stable and fair payment formula for physician services in the Medicare program. We appreciate your leadership and commitment to a reasonable, long term remedy on this issue.

Thank you again for your leadership on these important issues, and we look forward to working with you to pass needed health care reform for all Americans, particularly cancer patients.

Sincerely,

Laura I. Thevenot

cc: Rep. Charlie Rangel  
Rep. Henry Waxman  
Rep. George Miller  
Rep. Pete Stark  
Rep. Frank Pallone  
Rep. Rob Andrews  
Rep. John Dingell