1501 M Street, NW • Suite 300 • Washington, DC • 20005 • Phone: (202) 289-2222 • Fax: (202) 371-0384 • mail@asawash.org • www.asahq.org

Expand Access to Anesthesiology Medical Care Support Rural "Pass-Through" Legislation

H.R. 1044, "Medicare Access to Rural Anesthesiology Act"

ISSUE

Medicare normally pays for the services of anesthesia providers using the Medicare Part B fee schedule. However, low Part B payments and low patient volume make retention of anesthesia providers difficult for some rural hospitals. To address this issue, in the 1980s, Congress approved a provision – a rural provider incentive – that would allow certain rural hospitals to use a more generous Medicare Part A "pass-through" arrangement to contract for the services of non-physician anesthesia providers – anesthesiologist assistants and nurse anesthetists. Inexplicably, the law did not then and does not now permit rural hospitals to use "pass-through" funds to employ or contract with anesthesiologists.

H.R. 1044, the "Medicare Access to Rural Anesthesiology Act," introduced by Reps. Lynn Jenkins (R-KS), Henry Cuellar (D-TX), and Todd Akin (R-MO) would broaden the policy and allow rural hospitals to use already available "pass-through" funds to employ or contract with all types of anesthesia providers – anesthesiologists, as well as anesthesiologist assistants and nurse anesthetists. ASA strongly supports this legislation.

PROBLEM

- Low Medicare Part B anesthesia payments and low patient volume in rural areas make it difficult for rural hospitals to retain anesthesia providers.
- Current law allows some rural hospitals to use a more generous Medicare Part A "pass-through" arrangement to pay for the services of anesthesiologist assistants and nurse anesthetists. The "pass-through" arrangement cannot be used for anesthesiologists.
- In 2002 and 2010, the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA), through formal comment, requested that CMS permit rural hospitals to use the rural pass-through arrangement for anesthesiologists, as well as the other providers. CMS has responded that it could not permit hospitals to use the pass-through arrangement for anesthesiologists without a change in the current law.

CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST

 Please cosponsor and pass H.R. 1044 and Senate companion legislation that would extend rural hospitals' use of Medicare's pass-through arrangement to anesthesiologists.

Extending the pass-through arrangement to anesthesiologists allows eligible rural hospitals to utilize the rural incentive payment for all types of anesthesia providers.

In rural hospitals, there is an acknowledged shortfall of physician health care providers. By extending the pass-through, rural hospitals could more readily recruit and retain anesthesiologists to provide physician anesthesia services in rural areas.

Anesthesiologists: Physicians providing the lifeline of modern medicine.

Founded in 1905, the American Society of Anesthesiologists is an educational, research and scientific association with 46,000 members organized to raise and maintain the standards of the medical practice of anesthesiology and improve the care of the patient.