



Physicians Caring for Texans

Oct. 28, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W
Washington, DC 20201

Dear President Trump and Secretary Azar:

On behalf of the nearly 53,000 physician and medical student members of the Texas Medical Association (TMA), I am writing to provide some preliminary comments regarding the Oct. 3, 2019, Executive Order entitled, "Protecting and Improving Medicare for Our Nation's Seniors."

TMA has long been committed to working with Congress and the Administration to strengthen Medicare, which provides health care coverage for millions of our patients. In general, we agree with your stated goal "to improve the Medicare program by enhancing its fiscal sustainability through alternative payment methodologies that link payment to value, increase choice, and lower regulatory burdens imposed upon providers." We were pleased to see that the Executive Order included plans to remove barriers to private contracting and enact site-neutral payment policies.

However, we strongly oppose section 5 of the Executive Order, which would threaten the health and safety of our Medicare patients. We urge you to remove that section entirely.

Due to the vast differences in their education, skills, and training, health care professionals with various degrees and licenses are not interchangeable. Physicians appreciate the value that all members of the health care team can deliver for our patients. But physicians, who shoulder the ultimate responsibility for patient health and safety, are the only ones who can or should lead and supervise the other members of our health care team.

The broad language in section 5 appears to be predicated on some nonphysician practitioners' mistaken impressions that they can provide safe and appropriate care as well as, or better than, physicians. That ignores the critical facts that:

- Physicians spend six to 11 years in highly organized training after earning an undergraduate degree, vs. two to three years for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), two to three years for physician assistants (PAs), and four years for chiropractors and optometrists.
- Physicians must undergo 12,000 to 16,000 hours of clinical training before they can begin practice, vs. 500 to 1,500 hours for APRNs, 2,000 hours for PAs, and 80 weeks for podiatrists.
- The practice of medicine is fundamentally different from nursing, or podiatry, or chiropractic, or optometry. While physicians may delegate certain tasks and duties to those

other practitioners in appropriate situations in accordance with their licenses and competencies, only the physician is responsible for each patient's entire well-being.

Certainly our health care systems must grow and adapt with our patients' needs and the capabilities of the members of the health care team. We must grow more cost-efficient. We must learn how to prevent disease as well as we can cure it. Deliberate, strategic change can be good for our patients and everyone who pays for patient care.

But change rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities – as well as the training and capabilities – of various health care professions will result in lower quality, more expensive care for our patients.

For the safety and health of our patients, we request in the strongest terms possible that you remove section 5 from the Oct. 3, 2019, Executive Order.

We look forward to working with you to find and implement many needed improvements to the Medicare system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David C. Fleeger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being the most prominent.

David C. Fleeger, MD
President

cc: The Honorable Members of the Texas Delegation, United States Congress