

National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization



March 7, 2017

The Honorable Lynn Jenkins
United States House of Representatives
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Thompson
United States House of Representatives
231 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Jenkins and Congressman Thompson,

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), our more than 1,200 members, and the more than 1.5 million patients our members care for each year, we are proud to support the *Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act of 2017*. This legislation would remove a barrier in current law that restricts patients' access to the hospice attending physician of their choice.

The hospice attending physician is an important member of the hospice inter-disciplinary team. The attending physician certifies a patient's terminal prognosis, directs symptom management, prescribes appropriate treatment, and manages the patient's plan of care in collaboration with others. The hospice attending physician can be either the patient's long-standing primary care provider or a hospice provider.

Unfortunately, the shortage of primary care providers is creating a concomitant shortage of hospice attending physicians. Moreover, Medicare allows only physicians and nurse practitioners to serve as a patient's hospice attending physician. Physician assistants – who are licensed, certified health care providers who are explicitly trained in the area of primary care – are currently prohibited from serving as the hospice attending physician.

This prohibition creates a significant burden for hospices and patients alike. In many communities – especially rural and underserved communities – hospices cannot find enough primary care providers to meet the demand. Further, patients who receive primary care from a PA prior to their hospice election must give up that provider when they elect hospice. This can cause significant stress for patients at an already difficult time.

The *Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act of 2017* would address this issue by allowing PAs to serve as the attending physician to hospice patients and perform other functions that are otherwise consistent with their scope of practice. This common sense, bipartisan legislation will go a long way to ensuring that patients can have their preferred care team at the end of life. NHPCO strongly supports this important legislation and look forward to working with you on its enactment.

Thank you for your outstanding leadership on behalf of individuals at the end of life.

Sincerely,

Edo Banach, J.D.
President and CEO