

Introduce Bipartisan Access to Medicare and Hospice Act,

Allowing Physician Assistants to Serve Hospice Patients

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representatives Mike Thompson (CA-1) and Lee Terry (NE-2) yesterday introduced legislation increasing rural communities' access to high quality health care. The bipartisan "Medicare Hospice Access Care Act," allows physician assistants to care for Medicare hospice patients.

"This is a common sense step for American health care. Medicare patients in rural parts of our great country should have the same freedom of choice as Medicare patients in America's cities. Our legislation ensures this, guaranteeing uninterrupted hospice benefits to seniors in medically underserved communities," said Terry.

"No matter who you are or where you live, everyone deserves access to high quality health care," said Thompson. "This legislation will allow Medicare patients to continue seeing the health care provider they know, are comfortable with, and that understands their health history. Entering hospice should not mean losing the health care provider a patient has come to depend on."

Often, physician assistants are the only health care professionals in rural areas. In 2010 alone, nearly 307 million patient visits were made to physician assistants. While Medicare coverage was originally extended to physician assistants through the 1977 Rural Health Clinic Services Act, the program was never updated to allow physician assistants to deliver hospice care. Under current law, physician assistants may provide care to Medicare patients - until hospice care is needed. At this point, Medicare patients must then find an alternative provider, disrupting the continuity of their care.

With this legislation, individuals and families who rely on physician assistants as their primary health care professional would be ensured continuity of quality medical care when patients move from the hospital to hospice care.

"I commend Representatives Lee Terry and Mike Thompson for introducing the Medicare Hospice Access Care Act," said AAPA President Robert Wooten. "The bill will increase access to quality hospice care for those relying on Medicare. Currently, physician assistants cannot provide hospice care for their terminally ill Medicare patients, and an undue burden falls on the patient and family to find alternative care. We cannot deny patients access to their 'medical home' at a time when they are the most vulnerable."