

## **Medicare Technology Access Reforms Proposed by Vice President in Speech on Cancer**

Vice President Al Gore gave his support in a June 1 speech to two important steps to improve Medicare beneficiary access to innovative medical technologies. Announcing his proposals to fight cancer, Gore called for more rapid Medicare action on new technologies and broad beneficiary access to cancer clinical trials.

Gore also highlighted the significant impact that new treatments are having on cancer survival rates and the even greater promise of future technologies.

The Gore proposals followed a recent speech by Gov. George Bush calling for improved Medicare beneficiary access to innovative technology ([click here](#) for details in the May 22 issue of *MT&I*).

### **Patients with cancer and other diseases and conditions need timely Medicare decisions on innovative medical technologies.**

- In his June 1 speech at Emory University, Gore proposed “a new ‘fast track’ approval process so that Medicare always covers the latest cancer tests.” Gore said “we cannot allow anything to discourage seniors from getting the latest and best of life-saving tests.”
- Medicare now can take four-and-a-half years or more to make innovative technologies available to beneficiaries. Problems in Medicare are hindering cancer patients’ access to important technologies such as positron emission tomography (PET) testing and a breakthrough bladder cancer test. In fact, Medicare still does not cover PET for some of the cancer indications that private plans have covered for years.

### **Medicare beneficiaries need broader access to clinical trials of cutting-edge technologies.**

- “We have to expand Medicare, so more seniors can take part in more clinical trials,” Gore said, “and we must act now, by law or by executive action, to get this done...Let’s be sure that every American who has cancer also has the most up-to-date treatments America has to offer.”
- A report released by the Institute of Medicine last December recommended applying this important principle to all patients. The report called for broad Medicare coverage for beneficiaries in clinical trials.
- Medicare policy currently permits reimbursement for investigational devices that represent incremental advances over existing technology. The policy should be clarified to eliminate the uncertainty that exists over whether these products will receive coverage. In addition, Medicare should pay for the patient care costs that would otherwise be required for beneficiaries participating in clinical trials sponsored by any federal agency.

## **Bipartisan legislation will help eliminate barriers to beneficiary access to new technologies.**

- Bipartisan legislation introduced by Reps. Jim Ramstad (R-MN) and Karen Thurman (D-FL) (H.R. 4395) on May 10 would improve Medicare beneficiary access to new technologies.
- The Medicare Patient Access to Technology Act would help eliminate delays in Medicare's coverage, coding and payment procedures for new technologies. For example, Medicare would have to: issue temporary codes at the time of FDA review, update codes every quarter, make better use of internal and external data in adjusting its reimbursement policies, and update its payment systems annually to keep pace with medical innovation.
- H.R. 4395 also would improve Medicare's focus on technology access, requiring annual reports on technology access in the outpatient and inpatient settings and also on the timeliness of Medicare's coverage decisions. In addition, one member of the Medicare Payment Advisory Committee would have to have expertise in medical technology.

### **QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

“We cannot allow anything to discourage seniors from getting the latest and best of life-saving tests.”  
-Vice President Al Gore, June 1 speech at Emory University

### **ACTION ITEM**

Call or e-mail presidential candidates Al Gore (615-340-3260, [townhall@algore2000.com](mailto:townhall@algore2000.com)) and George Bush (512-637-2000 or <http://www.georgewbush.com/contact/index.html>) and ask them to meet their commitments to medical technology access for America's seniors by endorsing the principles contained in H.R. 4395, the Medicare Patient Access to Technology Act.

### **RELATED LINKS:**

[Vice President Gore's proposals](#) to improve Medicare beneficiary access to technology and other health care recommendations.

[Gov. Bush's proposals](#) to improve Medicare beneficiary access to technology and other health care recommendations.

Legislative text of the [Medicare Patient Access to Technology Act of 2000](#)

[HIMA recommendations](#) for improving Medicare patient access to innovative technologies.