

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

January 6, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Reid:

I write to express my concern with the 2010 Medicare physician fee schedule rule and its impact to private practice cardiology in Louisiana. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have relied on faulty survey data that will result in significant payment cuts to cardiology effective January 1, 2010 unless Congress intervenes.

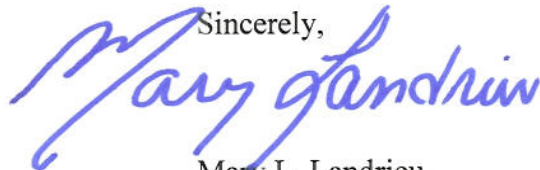
The CMS data used to calculate these fees showed a 40 percent decline in costs associated with running a cardiovascular practice. Cardiologists estimate, however, that costs have actually increased five to six percent every year. The fee schedule includes payment cuts ranging from 10 to more than 40 percent for almost all cardiology services starting on January 1, 2010. This translates into a 20 percent overall cut for the average private cardiology practice - not counting the scheduled 21.5 percent payment cut due to the sustainable growth rate formula.

I understand that these cuts, along with other payment policies, are severely impacting cardiology practices in my state. Many practices have been sold to hospitals, forced to lay off staff, or cut outreach services to rural areas. Other cardiologists are retiring early, at a time when there is already a cardiology workforce shortage. I am concerned that this rule will harm Louisiana Medicare beneficiaries' access to quality cardiovascular care.

Our nation has made significant progress in improving the lives of individuals with heart disease over the last three decades. In the last decade alone, heart disease related deaths have decreased by 27 percent thanks to a sophisticated system of diagnosis and treatment. These cuts could reverse decades of progress in the treatment of heart disease. I hope that Congress will consider the potential impact of these cuts and take the necessary steps to mitigate them in a timely manner.

With warmest personal regards, I am

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator