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MEDICARE CUTS IMPACT PATIENTS' ACCESS TO CARDIOLOGY CARE IN COLORADO SPRINGS

Thousands of Patients to be Affected as Cardiology Practices in Colorado Springs are Forced to Reduce Staff, Close Offices and Eliminate Services due to 2010 Medicare Cuts

Colorado Springs, CO – As early as January, two of Colorado Spring's largest cardiovascular care practices will be forced to cut back on patient services and reduce staff due to Medicare reimbursement cuts – both moves will significantly impact patient access and care in the Colorado Springs area.

Pike's Peak Cardiology and Colorado Springs Cardiology combine to treat more than 1,500 patients per week in the Colorado Springs metropolitan area and are just two of the area practices that will be affected by the cuts. The Medicare cuts, which reduce Medicare reimbursements for tests and procedures, will reduce Medicare payments by up to 40 percent to all cardiovascular practices in the country. The cuts will take effect January 1.

Pike's Peak Cardiology will eliminate many imaging tests for Medicare patients and send them to hospitals for necessary tests. As a result, patients will have higher copayments, (in some instances two to three times greater) and will no longer be able to receive immediate feedback from their cardiologist. Pike's Peak Cardiology currently employs approximately 120 full-time employees at its office, imaging center and outreach program. The cuts will result in delayed access to care, impact clinic staffing and restrict the facility's outreach program.

“Like every other practice, we're desperately trying to avoid layoffs and service cut backs, but we are a business and to stay in business we have to balance our budgets and pay our overhead expenses,” said William Mantia, the CEO of Pike's Peak Cardiology. “My staff has made sacrifices – accepting wage freezes and reductions in benefits – because they care about our patients and our physicians. Because of these cuts we have to make difficult economic and patient access decisions. We can't help people and save lives if we can't cover the costs of our services.”

Colorado Springs Cardiology is also considering cut backs and restricted services. Colorado Springs Cardiology has nuclear imaging cameras at both of its facilities, but will centralize its operations to reduce costs, which would include staff reductions. As with other practices, Colorado Springs Cardiology would refer some imaging tests to hospitals, making treatments more time consuming and expensive for patients.

“I’m concerned that patients will avoid care or delay care which would have a significant negative impact on their health,” said Robert Cadigan, a cardiologist at Colorado Springs Cardiology. “Some of our patients drive two or three hours because we can give them complete treatment in our offices. Without that ability many senior patients and those who are seriously ill will have a much harder time getting treatment.”

The Medicare cuts are based on a survey that includes data from just 55 of the nearly 40,000 cardiovascular practices in the United States. The survey results were not validated by Medicare, as is required, before enacting the cuts.

“Despite the unprecedented success by the cardiovascular community in reducing the mortality due to heart disease by 27 percent over the past three years, cardiology was targeted for an almost 40 percent reduction in Medicare fees across all services,” said Denver cardiologist Eugene Sherman, who is the governor of the Colorado chapter of the American College of Cardiology. “The result of these cuts will be reduction, in many cases drastic reductions, in our patients’ ability to receive care as many practices will be forced to close.”

About the American College of Cardiology

The American College of Cardiology is leading the way to optimal cardiovascular care and disease prevention. The College is a 37,000-member nonprofit medical society and bestows the credential Fellow of the American College of Cardiology upon physicians who meet its stringent qualifications. The College is a leader in the formulation of health policy, standards and guidelines, and is a staunch supporter of cardiovascular research. The ACC provides professional education and operates national registries for the measurement and improvement of quality care. More information about the association is available online at www.acc.org.

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