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## **MEDICARE CUTS IMPACT PATIENTS' ACCESS TO CARDIOLOGY CARE IN BIRMINGHAM**

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

Birmingham, AL – As early as January, several of Birmingham'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 Birmingham area.

Two of Birmingham's leading cardiovascular practices, the Birmingham Heart Clinic and the Alabama Cardiovascular Group combine to treat more than 1,000 patients per week in the Birmingham 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 and will affect every cardiovascular practice in the Birmingham area.

The Birmingham Heart Clinic has three locations but due to the Medicare cuts, it is significantly reducing hours at its satellite office in Hoover to one half day per week. Alabama Cardiovascular Group operates three main offices as well as four satellite offices. The satellite offices in Blount County, St. Clair County and Shelby County could be cut because of the Medicare cuts. Other area practices could also be forced to close offices. Such cutbacks will make it much more difficult for senior patients living in rural areas to get heart-related health care.

“Because of the demographics and the rural nature of our state, cardiologists and cardiovascular practices face a unique set of challenges in Alabama. We certainly have risen to that challenge and provided the highest level of care possible but 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,” said cardiologist Phillip Laney, who is the governor of the Alabama chapter of the American College of Cardiology.

In addition to office closures and cutbacks, Birmingham area cardiovascular practices will also be forced to eliminate certain services and send Medicare patients to area hospitals for procedures that they have been accustomed to receiving in their physician's office or at the local satellite office location. Furthermore, patients will possibly see an increase in their out-of-pocket expense as a result of this change in location for diagnostic testing/outpatient procedure. Medicare cuts

– more –

have already forced the Alabama Cardiovascular Group to close its Coumadin clinic and could force the closure of other ancillary services.

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,” Laney said. “Patient care will suffer because of these cuts. Many patients, if they don’t have access to care nearby, will not be able to get care.”

### **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](http://www.acc.org).

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