What Can Congress Do?

The American Academy of Neurology Professional Association—an association of more than 21,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals—is dedicated to excellence in high quality patient-centered neurologic care through education, advocacy, the development of evidence-based clinical guidelines, and research.

A neurologist is a doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating, and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system such as stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease, ALS, multiple sclerosis (MS), and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The Academy supports health reform proposals that address the unique needs of patients with severe, progressive, or chronic diseases or conditions that require extensive and time-consuming counseling and coordination of care including patient education, family counseling, and coordination with social service, mental health professionals, physical and occupational therapists, and home health providers.

Neurologists routinely provide an intense level of care to patients with chronic neurologic disorders. However, current payment systems to neurologists and other “cognitive” specialties do not appropriately compensate for these services. The scheduled 21-percent cut in the Medicare physician reimbursement on January 1, 2010, would severely limit access to care for Medicare beneficiaries and should be replaced with a system that:

• Rewards the provision of evaluation and management (E/M) services to certain eligible patients who require intensive, time-consuming care management and coordination. Options could include a separate monthly payment to specialists for management and coordination of care services or a higher conversion factor for E/M services to certain eligible “high-cost” patients.

• Focuses on patient-centered care versus procedure-focused care.

• Rewards high quality evidence-based care.

• Provides an incentive for the best and brightest students to train in specialty medicine that oversees care for this category of patients.

We agree that the current system undervalues care provided by primary care medical professionals yet believe that it also equally undervalues care provided by medical specialties such as neurology. Payment reform should not be based on the title used by the physician; it should be based on the patient receiving the care. Payment reform must be directed to all medical professionals who care for patients with chronic, debilitating, or progressive diseases or conditions.

By developing and reforming the payment system that meets the criteria above, the Academy believes patients will receive more effective high quality care with little overall cost impact to the health care system.