Hello,

I’m Mike Amery and I represent the American Academy of Neurology. Neurologists diagnose, treat, and manage disorders of the brain and nervous system, such as Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease, and Multiple Sclerosis.

Neurologists continue to be very concerned about the commission’s emphasis on primary care and lack of recognition for cognitive physicians, those specialists who sit down face to face with complex patients and primarily provide evaluation and management care.

As an example, the most recent commission report stated that, “The physician fee schedule must be rebalanced to achieve greater equity of payments between primary care and other specialties.”

We completely agree that something must be done to improve the practice climate for primary care providers. But we think the more appropriate distinction in accomplishing this is between cognitive care and procedural care. We have current data showing that cognitive specialists are in the same crisis as primary care. Physicians such as neurologists, rheumatologists, endocrinologists and infectious disease doctors bill the same evaluation and management codes as primary care physicians, have similar incomes and face the same recruiting problems.

The National Commission on Physician Payment Reform stated in March 2012, “While the discussion about reimbursement has generally focused on services performed by primary care physicians, the commission believes that the real issue is not one of relative payment of specialists versus primary care physicians but, rather, of payment for E&M services as contrasted with procedural services.”

Portions of the ACA such as the Medicaid bump and the primary care bonus will be expiring in the near future.

This distinction will be essential not just for improving access to primary care providers but also access to the physicians essential to some of America’s highest need, highest cost Medicare beneficiaries. We strongly urge you to support improvement of payments for E&M for physicians who primarily bill E&M and not just for those designated as “primary care.”