The American Academy of Neurology, the world’s largest professional association of neurologists, promotes the highest quality patient-centered neurologic care. Comprised of more than 26,000 practicing and research neurologists, the Academy’s membership includes most of the neurology professionals in the United States complemented by several thousand neurologists from throughout the world.

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The Critical Role of Neurologists in Our Health Care System
Preserving Our Patients’ Access to Care
The American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the world’s largest professional association of neurologists, recognizes the critical need to improve the current US health care system. Too many US citizens do not have access to the right medical professional at the right time. When access is available, unanswerable questions remain about rising health care costs and the quality of the care US health care consumers receive.

The AAN urges policymakers, as they develop, debate, and enact health care policy measures, to consider the specific concerns of neurologists and the unique needs of patients with neurologic disease. This document provides an overview of conditions and patients neurologists treat, the increasing demand for neurologic services, and the role neurologists have in managing complex chronic conditions, which account for an overwhelming proportion of health care expenditures.

The American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the world’s largest professional association of neurologists, recognizes the critical need to improve the health care system for patients with neurologic disease. The critical role of neurologists in our health care system is highlighted by the fact that 1 in 6 people currently suffers from a neurologic condition. As baby boomers age, health care professionals will see an increasing number of patients living with neurologic conditions including dementia, stroke, epilepsy, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s disease. As the number of older citizens increases dramatically and puts additional stress on our health care system, policymakers must help ensure there are properly trained clinicians available to provide high-quality care.

Why are neurologists important for the future?

Significant time and skill are required to diagnose neurologic conditions, talk over a life-shattering diagnosis, and then manage treatment options. Although cognitive care is time-intensive, it is not appropriately recognized in the existing reimbursement system. Due to the declining compensation for cognitive care, neurologists have less time to spend with their patients. Consequently, patients may experience reduced quality of care and have limited access to neurologic services.

With an estimated one in six people currently suffering from a neurologic disease, policymakers must help ensure there are properly trained clinicians available to provide high-quality care. As baby boomers age, health care professionals will see an increasing number of patients living with neurologic conditions including dementia, stroke, epilepsy, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s disease.

Why neurologists matter

A neurologist is a doctor with specialized training in diagnosing, treating, and managing disorders of the brain and nervous system. Neurologists are often confused with neurosurgeons who perform brain surgery. Almost all neurologic conditions can be treated, but few are curable or preventable. Most require highly skilled long-term management to maximize the quality of life of patients and their families. The American Academy of Neurology—an association of more than 26,000 neurologists and neuroscience professionals—is dedicated to excellence in patient-centered neurologic care through education, advocacy, and research. One of the main goals of the AAN is to ensure patient access to the right care.

What is a neurologist?

What is the practice of neurology?

Neurologists have specialized training to evaluate patient symptoms, diagnose neurologic conditions, and to recommend or provide treatments to cure, delay, or minimize the progression of the disease whenever possible. This type of care is known as “cognitive care, in contrast to care focused on procedures.”

What do we mean by ‘cognitive care’?

Cognitive care specialists are physicians with additional training in a specific field of medicine who primarily provide face-to-face care, also known as evaluation and management (E/M) services, to people with complex medical conditions. These conditions require a level of expertise which the referring physician is not trained to provide. Cognitive care services are thought of as higher level E/M services needed to diagnose and manage complex and usually chronic conditions.

What do we do?

Neurologists have not been recognized properly for the critical role they play in our health care system. The inadequate recognition by payers of the value of cognitive care creates disincentives for young physicians to enter the field of neurology and results in workforce shortages at a time of increasing need for specialized care. Moreover, the types of diseases neurologists spend considerable time managing account for an overwhelming proportion of health care expenditures.

Health care policies that support primary care doctors must also recognize the vital role neurologists have in managing complex chronic conditions. Policies intended to reward the management and coordination of care of patients with complex chronic conditions should be directed to any physician who spends a majority of his or her time managing chronic conditions regardless of specialty designation.

Neurology by the numbers

- 1 in 6 people in the United States is suffering from a neurologic disease.
- A majority of a neurology practice is spent on cognitive care, evaluating and managing the care of patients with chronic disorders.
- Between 2000 and 2008, Medicare payments for procedural services grew by 84 percent, while payments for cognitive care grew by only 48 percent.
- Only 46.7 percent of residents matching to neurology in 2013 were US seniors. That is nearly a 20 percent change from the year before when 58.2 percent of matched neurology residents were US seniors.
- Shortages of neurologists are well documented by shorter visits with neurologists and longer appointment wait times. Wait times have increased 40 percent for a new patient visit in the last two years.

Neurologic conditions treated by neurologists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Number of people affected in the United States</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>Every year, about 795,000 Americans have a stroke. In the US, someone has a stroke every 40 seconds. Every three to four minutes, someone dies of stroke, the fourth leading cause of death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alzheimer’s disease</td>
<td>Over 5 million Americans. The sixth leading cause of death. The number of people with Alzheimer’s disease is expected to nearly triple in less than 40 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migraine/headache</td>
<td>More than 3 million Americans went to hospital emergency rooms for headache relief, particularly migraine, in 2008.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epilepsy</td>
<td>About 2 million Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury (TBI)</td>
<td>Approximately 1.7 million people sustain a traumatic brain injury annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</td>
<td>About 1.5 million Americans. About 1 in 88 children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder. 20 to 30 percent of children with autism develop epilepsy by the time they are adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkinson’s disease</td>
<td>At least 500,000 Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple sclerosis (MS)</td>
<td>Approximately 400,000 Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)</td>
<td>Approximately 30,000 Americans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected Percentage Growth in Disease Prevalence

- Dementia
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Alzheimer’s Disease
- History of Stroke
- Extrapyramidal Disease NEC
- Monosynaptics of Limb
- Mental Retardation
- Epilepsy
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Migraine
- Sleep Disorders
- ADHD

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