



Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc.
Saving the Hearts and Minds of a Diverse America

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ABC MISSION:

To promote the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease, including stroke, in Blacks and other minorities and to achieve health equity for all through the elimination of disparities.

October 17, 2017

The Honorable Brad Wenstrup
2419 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raul Ruiz
1319 Longworth House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Wenstrup and Ruiz:

I am pleased to offer the Association of Black Cardiologist's (ABC) endorsement of the "Restoring the Patient's Voice Act of 2017" (H.R 2077), which would amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to require a group health plan (or health insurance coverage offered in connection with such a plan) to provide an exceptions process for any medication step therapy protocol.

Founded in 1974, the ABC is a nonprofit organization with an international membership of 1,700 health professionals, lay members of the community (Community Health Advocates), corporate members, and institutional members. The ABC is dedicated to eliminating the disparities related to cardiovascular disease for all people of color. ABC adheres to the vision that all people regardless of race, ethnicity or gender should benefit equally from reduction in the frequency, duration and impact of diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

Prior authorization, drug switching and step-therapy are common cost-control strategies used by payors. These tactics, however, often interfere with evidence-based medicine and physician decision-making. This is particularly true for cardiovascular specialists who treat African Americans because African Americans may respond differently to medicines than people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

As an example of the need for your legislation, payors often require patients with elevated blood levels of cholesterol to be treated with a generic statin-type medication before a branded statin drug is approved, even if the patient has previously failed generic statin therapy while covered under a previous health insurance policy. This type of treatment-restricting, step-therapy requirement results in care delays and worse outcomes for affected patients. In this regard, we are grateful that your legislation creates an exception to medication step-therapy in certain circumstances, including when a drug, required as part of an insurer's step-therapy protocol, has been shown to be ineffective in a patient's treatment.

The ABC also supports the other exceptions to step-therapy outlined in your legislation, including restricting payors from imposing step-therapy when the use of such treatment would impede functional ability. Of equal importance, the effect of a medication on functional class improvement, not just mortality, should be considered an important outcome when treatment approvals are being requested by the patient's treating physician.

Your legislation embodies important and necessary changes to medication coverage and access policies. It is our hope that under your leadership this important legislation will advance through Congress. Should you have any questions or require additional information from the ABC, please contact Camille Bonta, consultant for the Association, at (202) 320-3658 or cbonta@summithealthconsulting.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Hutchinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

Barbara Hutchinson, MD, PhD, FACC
President
Association of Black Cardiologists