

Medicare Patients and Care Providers Fear Dire Consequences of Medicare Reform Bill

Concerned Citizens Plan to Protest Pending Legislation outside Offices of House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas in Bakersfield on Tuesday

BAKERSFIELD, CA (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – A grass-roots effort to focus attention on disturbing elements of the Medicare reform legislation some Medicare beneficiaries and patient-care advocates call “frightening” and “disastrous” will begin with an organized protest outside the Bakersfield offices of House Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas (R-CA) on Tuesday, Jan. 24. Last Chance for Patient Choice (a 527 not-for-profit organization) plans to launch its nationwide advocacy effort on the eve of the final budget reconciliation bill vote (S. 1932) by the U.S. House of Representatives that will probably occur during the first week of February.



Send2Press® Newswire “We’re

beginning our effort in Bakersfield because we’re particularly concerned about certain provisions in the bill inserted by Thomas himself,” explains John Gallagher, vice president-government relations for The VGM Group (www.vgm.com), an Iowa-based member service organization to which thousands of independent home medical equipment providers belong. “We don’t think he fully realizes how much his proposed legislation will hurt older Americans who depend so much on medical equipment and services.” The VGM Group is the

driving force behind the creation of Last Chance for Patient Choice.

About The Issue

Essentially, the provisions Thomas has inserted into the bill eliminate the current option available to older and disabled Americans on Medicare that allows them to continue to rent their home medical equipment, including that used for oxygen therapy. "Beneficiaries choose to rent rather than purchase because renting allows worry-free, professional maintenance of complex medical equipment and lowers costs to seniors," reports Gallagher. "It is unconscionably unfair, dangerous, and irresponsible for the government to literally force our senior Americans to take title of complex medical equipment after an arbitrarily capped rental period."

www.lastchanceforpatients.org

Oxygen equipment is essential for the 1 million Americans who suffer from respiratory illnesses such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and require oxygen therapy to survive.

Oxygen is a federal legend drug and the necessary devices and equipment are prescription-only elements. Medicare beneficiary advocates are concerned that transferring the burden of maintenance and repair of sophisticated oxygen technologies to patients presents a serious risk to their safety and care.

More Problems with Provisions Inserted by Representative Bill Thomas

"Bill Thomas also supports a new law that will require Medicare beneficiaries to be treated by a restricted group of providers selected by the government – not by the patient or the doctor – for one reason alone: their cut-rate services," adds John Gallagher. "This law will seriously compromise the quality of beneficiary care in all applicable areas – from wheelchairs to hospital beds; from home nursing care to prescription drugs; from doctors to hospitals and everything in between."

The Home-care Industry Response

Oxygen patients have not asked for any more "control" over their equipment. Long-term oxygen patients cannot walk to their mailboxes without becoming breathless, let alone handle a lot of extra responsibility for maintaining medical equipment they don't understand. Long-term oxygen users are generally very satisfied with their home-care providers as measured by patient satisfaction surveys.

Beneficiaries, who are often older and/or handicapped, do not know when servicing is necessary. Many cannot even begin to follow a manufacturer's warranty or recommended maintenance schedule. They have no exposure to product recalls mandated by the FDA and would not know how to comply with a recall if needed. Oxygen is an FDA-regulated drug produced from FDA-regulated medical devices. Home-care providers ensure that they are maintained regularly. "Does Congress really want to put frail seniors at risk of death or re-hospitalization due to low oxygen levels?" asks VGM Group Founder and CEO Van Miller. "We don't think they do, so we're doing our best to make sure

the American public does understand what's going on with the future of their health care."

Homecare Industry Attorney Voices Concern about Scope of Federal Powers and Inevitable Expansion – Doctors Next?

"I am especially concerned about the unbelievably broad range of almost dictatorial powers that Mr. Thomas's legislation will put into the hands of the Secretary of Health and Human Services," reports Jim Walsh, president of VGM Management, Ltd. and general counsel to The VGM Group. "Furthermore, once the federal government gains final control over the HME sector of health-care industry, what's to stop Washington bureaucrats from taking away the patient's right to choose their own hospitals, pharmacies, home health-care providers, assisted care facilities, therapists and even physicians? What will stop the bureaucracy from growing, once they've tasted blood?"

Walsh asserts that Thomas's "'competitive acquisition' legislation is probably seen by him as nothing more than a thinly-veiled first step in a concerted effort to eventually convert America's traditional free choice health-care system into a government-controlled, two-tier system with Medicare beneficiaries receiving the worst service and cheapest equipment from a small group of government-sponsored cut-rate providers via a cleverly spun scheme that has been purposefully misnamed 'competitive bidding'."

Bakersfield Just the Beginning – More Local Protests Planned

John Gallagher reports that Last Chance for Patient Choice already has more multimedia patient advocacy campaigns and protests planned for other congressional districts whose representatives are avowed, open supporters of legislative initiatives doomed to punish Medicare beneficiaries with undue financial burdens and limited access to quality home health care.

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