



Welcome to the leap year edition of the AMA's Very Influential Physician (VIP) Insider. Read on for details about these topics:

- Surprise billing update – Congress moves one step closer to vote
- VIP exclusive webinar: "Building Relationships with Congressional Staff"
- 2020 National Advocacy Conference recap
- AMA 2020 Advocacy dashboard now available

Surprise billing update – Congress moves one step closer to vote

Recently, the final two house committees of jurisdiction – Ways and Means and Education and Labor passed separate pieces of legislation aimed at tackling surprise medical bills.

While both bills work to address the pressing issue of surprise medical bills, they go about it in different ways. The Education and Labor Committee legislation would protect patients by limiting their out-of-pocket costs to amounts they would have owed if they had been treated in-network, but it does little to provide a robust and independent dispute resolution process for physicians. The legislation requires physicians meet a \$750 threshold to initiate appeals and trigger the dispute-resolution process. The vast majority of claims by physicians that would be considered a “surprise bill” do not reach that threshold. The legislation does not include bundling language, making hitting that \$750 target even more difficult.

The bipartisan Ways and Means legislation would also protect patients in a similar manner but doesn't include a minimum threshold and includes a “baseball-style” independent dispute-resolution process in which a mediator chooses which offer is the most reasonable and the losing side covers the cost of the proceedings. This approach, while not perfect, is a step in the right direction for resolving payment disputes, though there is still much that needs to be done.

Congress will now attempt to merge these bills, along with legislation passed by the Energy and Commerce Committee late last year, into a final surprise billing package before the May 22 deadline when funding for several popular health care programs is set to expire.

That leaves a very short window where physicians can make their voices heard on this issue. It is vital that you contact your members of Congress **today** to demand that the final surprise billing legislation should:

- Improve insurer accountability
- Limit patient financial liability
- Tie out-of-network payments to local market values
- Provide a robust and independent dispute resolution process
- Keep patients out of the middle of insurer-provider payment negotiations

Tell your legislators to keep working to ensure that the final surprise billing legislation includes a robust and independent dispute resolution process that treats all stakeholders equally while protecting access to care!

Please [call your legislators](#) today or use our [online action center](#) to send them an urgent message on this important issue!

Building Relationships with Congressional Staff

Join our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation on March 19, 2020 at 12:00 PM EDT for the new Citizen-Advocate webinar on building relationships with congressional staff and why it's important.

This webinar is an exclusive benefit for AMA's VIP program members - [Register here!](#)

Program Description: Advocacy days can vary in many ways. Regardless, when supporters receive their schedules, one thing always happens without fail. Someone complains that they have no meetings with their Members, just staff. CMF's presenters are inviting a real congressional staffer to join them on this webinar to discuss how building relationships with congressional staff is just as important as building relationships with Members of Congress themselves.

This program will explore the following topics:

- What it's like to work in Congress
- The value of building relationships with congressional staff
- Tips for building relationships with congressional staff

This program is based on exclusive and private surveys of congressional staff conducted by our partners at CMF and is available only to members of CMF's Partnership for a More Perfect Union. The webinar will be conducted by Bradford Fitch, CMF's President and CEO, and Seth Turner, CMF's Director of Citizen Engagement.

If you have any questions regarding this presentation, please contact Jaime Werner at JWerner@CongressFoundation.org.

2020 National Advocacy Conference recap - physicians are "making waves for the purpose of change"MI report: Freshman members often hire campaign staff

"They'll tell you talk is cheap, but you tell them silence is unaffordable." That was the message Sekou Andrews, creator of "Poetic Voice" kicked off the 2020 National Advocacy Conference with, reminding physician advocates that "there will always be those who will only wade waist-deep in the waters of change because they are afraid to make waves...today we are going to focus on making waves for the purpose of change." This sentiment echoed through the conference as attendees listened to speakers from the administration and from Congress, getting caught up on the latest issues in health care policy before heading to the Hill to make their voices heard.

In her speech Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [Administrator Seema Verma](#) touched on the health care priorities in the president's new budget, including expanding access to care and innovative treatments as well as fixing Medicare's wage index to help save rural hospitals. She also spoke about the burden of prior authorization (PA) being a primary driver of physician burnout saying, "The practice of prior authorization became indefensible years ago."

Efforts to ban surprise billing are under consideration in both congressional chambers, and the AMA is pressing lawmakers for a solution that protects patients but does not give insurers unreasonable negotiating power. One of the leading voices in this debate is Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) who gave an update to attendees on this issue and urged them to convey how these legislative proposals would affect their local communities.

Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD), MD, emphasized the need for physicians to be involved in policymaking. He encouraged physicians to tell stories about their patients saying, "I didn't get into medicine to take care of me, I went into medicine to take care of patients—remember that as you go to your legislators and your patients will be behind you." He emphasized the need for more robust research into legitimate indications for medical marijuana and asked for a federal solution to needless prior authorization delays.

The AMA presented its Dr. Nathan Davis Awards for Outstanding Government Service to six honorees, including physicians who have served their patients by working in state houses, governors' mansions, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), working to move medicine forward on issues like surprise medical bills, malaria research, environmental health, gaps in mental health care and research on addiction.

Echoing the sentiment of many of the physician advocates in the room and speaking to the power of organized medicine, Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) said: "When I talk to the medical students, they say, 'Would you still go into medicine today?' I said, 'Yes.' Would I join the American Medical Association again? Proudly."

New AMA advocacy dashboard now available

As we move into the new year, the AMA advocacy team has updated their advocacy dashboard which highlights wins and ongoing work in addressing surprise medical bill proposals, improving Medicare physician payment, regulatory relief, fighting prior authorization and insurer practices that hinder patient care, ending the opioid epidemic, fighting for drug price transparency, preventing gun violence, addressing health equity and protecting immigrant health.

[Access the full advocacy dashboard here.](#)
