

ACP AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS INTERNAL MEDICINE | *Doctors for Adults*

What Internists are Saying About Medicare Cuts

“Like most Internal Medicine offices, our overhead exceeds 60%. We can see at most about 10 patients per half day. Therefore, the first 6 patients are “just to keep the lights on.” The addition of an electronic health record, in anticipation of pay for performance, will predictably increase the overhead for this six physician practice substantially. It is impossible to make up for this cost of delivering primary care by seeing more patients for shorter periods. You simply cannot take care of chronically ill, aging people with 10-15 minute office visits. Primary care physicians need greater funding, not less.”

Jeffrey P. Harris, MD, FACP, Millwood, VA

“Recruiting a general internist or family practitioner to a busy Brookings, SD practice is extremely challenging. These docs are becoming few and far between. And yet as the population ages, we will need more and more of them. It is no wonder that med student graduates are turning away from primary care as their choice for specialty training. This very demanding field will be most affected if Medicare payments are reduced. Isn't it a paradox that, in general, primary care docs provide a less expensive brand of care than the specialty-driven type. It's not only in rural South Dakota, but it is in every community large and small throughout this country, that the impact of fewer primary care doctors will be felt. It is short sighted of the government and of all third-party payers to discourage by poor payment the desirability of the field of primary care medicine.”

Richard P. Holm, MD, FACP, Brookings, South Dakota

“Only 4 of the 95 members of the third-year class at the University of Missouri School of Medicine have asked for letters of recommendation from the chair of Internal Medicine. This means that only 4 of the 95 will be seeking residency positions in Internal Medicine. The continuing decrease in primary care physicians is, in my opinion, related to the continuing decreases in Medicare reimbursement. So patients with zits will have plenty of bright Dermatologists to care for them, whereas Medicare-dependent senior citizens with hypertension and diabetes are out of luck.”

Sara Walker, MD, FACP, Missouri

“A drop in Medicare payments will not only force me to stop taking Medicare patients but could force me out of business. Many other insurance contracts are tied to the Medicare payment rate. I could not afford thousands of dollars in decreased revenue in the face of rising costs. My practice expenses will rise \$10,000 in 2006. Medicare and other payors must keep pace with the cost of doing business. Failure to do so will force doctors out of business and places American lives in danger.”

Kevin Lutz, MD, FACP, Denver, CO, a solo private practitioner