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MEDICARE THERAPY CAP PREVENTS ACCESS TO NEEDED HEALTH CARE SERVICES

(Bethesda, MD)—Occupational therapy practitioners are receiving bipartisan support for their efforts to stop the Medicare therapy cap from taking effect in 2008. Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD), Susan Collins (R-ME) and John Ensign (R-NV), and Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA) addressed "Stop the Therapy Cap" events sponsored by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) along with six other health care organizations.

More than 100 professionals, practitioners, and consumers made visits to Capitol Hill on Wednesday, October 31, to request that Congress stop the Medicare therapy cap from taking effect in 2008. The therapy cap was initiated 10 years ago but has never been fully implemented by Congress.

"It was an honor and a privilege to represent the profession of occupational therapy and, more importantly, the elderly clients we serve at the Therapy Cap Day on Capitol Hill," said Kathleen Weissberg, an occupational therapist with EnduraCare Therapy Management. "Hopefully, understanding the reality that clients and practitioners face regarding the cap on therapy will assist our legislators to make the best public policy decisions and ones that will both positively impact the elderly and allow them coverage for medically necessary therapy services."

In the morning briefing, Senator Cardin emphasized that the Medicare therapy cap is not good public policy and that it needs to be overturned. Senator Collins explained to participants the importance of pressing members of Congress for an answer on whether they will join in and co-sponsor legislation to stop the cap.

In a noon press conference, Senator John Ensign recounted how he has opposed the cap since 1998. "Repealing the cap should have a sense of urgency because this is a penny-wise, pound-foolish issue we can't afford to ignore." He emphasized that therapy is a preventative service that provides savings in the long run. Representative Becerra, the lead House of Representatives sponsor said "We are here to fight; our family members are the victims." Representatives from Easter Seals and the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association also supported the advocacy to repeal the cap.

AOTA also sponsored a virtual advocacy day that resulted in hundreds of e-mails and phone calls to Congress from occupational therapy practitioners.

Founded in 1917, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is the nationally recognized professional association of approximately 38,000 occupational therapy practitioners and students. AOTA advances the quality, availability, use and support of occupational therapy through advocacy, education, and research on behalf of its members and the public.

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