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**ASHA URGES CONGRESS TO STOP THE RATIONING OF REHABILITATION THERAPY**

The American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) kicks off a nationwide campaign Thursday, August 26 urging Congress to end unfair treatment for seniors by supporting the "Medicare Rehabilitation Benefit Improvement Act of 1999" (H.R. 1837 and its companion Senate Bill, S.472).

H.R. 1837 would provide exceptions for an arbitrary \$1500 cap that was placed on outpatient speech-language rehabilitation services combined with physical therapy. The arbitrary cap was included in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and went into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

ASHA members and their allies will appeal over the airwaves and throughout newspapers to voters and representatives to end the arbitrary \$1500 cap on outpatient rehabilitation services.

Because of the cap, nearly 3.8 million California Medicare patients could be forced to make a choice between walking and talking if Congress doesn't act fast to establish an exception for patients who exceed this arbitrary cap.

Following are specific ASHA concerns related to the \$1,500 cap on outpatient rehabilitation services for Medicare patients:

- Older Americans who have exhausted the \$1500 limit will have no choice but to disrupt their care with skilled rehabilitation and nursing practitioners and forced to seek it in less accessible hospital outpatient departments.
- Placing speech pathology and physical therapy under a shared \$1500 cap will force families to make the detrimental choice (walk, talk or even swallow) to ration medically needed care.
- Speech-language pathology, representing only 9 percent of Medicare's outpatient rehabilitation, is a separate profession that addresses different clinical needs of Medicare beneficiaries from physical therapy.

According to ASHA President Donna Geffner, Ph.D., CCC-A/SLP, "the cap is arbitrary and onerous. Already 13 percent of eligible patients are meeting or exceeding the cap. As a result, Medicare beneficiaries have lost access to much needed services."