

Sample Letter to the Editor

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Local Newspaper
Address
City, State Zip

I am a health care professional who provides services to older Americans who have degenerative neurological diseases, or have experienced debilitating strokes or head trauma. My clients work long and hard to improve their quality of life, or in many cases, to simply maintain their ability to swallow, talk or communicate with their caregivers. As a health care professional, I am troubled that their ability to recover has been compounded by a breach of faith committed by the U.S. Congress. While saying it would not cut Medicare benefits, Congress, in effect, did just that when it passed the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. The Act placed an arbitrary cap of \$1500 a year on speech-language pathology services **and** physical therapy combined.

I have already witnessed the detrimental effects the cap is having on older Americans. In some instances, patients requiring both speech-language pathology services and physical therapy find themselves having to choose between speech and language treatment to regain their ability to talk or swallow and [or] physical therapy to regain their ability to walk. In other cases, patients have refused medically necessary treatment for fear they may have a more acute episode or injury later in the year, choosing instead to save all or part of their \$1500 cap money for such a possibility.

Instead of saving money, we are beginning to see that these budget cuts can actually increase Medicare costs. Because the cap applies to skilled nursing facilities and other outpatient rehabilitation care givers, the cap can force those who hit the financial limit of treatment to need more dependent and costly care or even rehospitalization.

A growing number of Members of Congress have recognized that the arbitrary cap is not good health policy. Both the House and Senate are now considering the "Medicare Rehabilitation Benefit Improvement Act of 1999" (H.R. 1837 and S. 472), which would provide exemptions to the arbitrary cap to Medicare beneficiaries in need of services. The Senate now has more than 50 co-sponsors backing this important legislation. Representatives in the U.S. House should also co-sponsor and pass this bill, which would help to rectify this poor policy decision.

Sincerely,

Your name
Title
Address
Phone