



Physicians Caring for Texans

## **TMA STATEMENT — FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Feb. 25, 2010

### **Countdown to Medicare Meltdown: Day 4**

*The following can be attributed to William H. Fleming III, MD, president of the Texas Medical Association. Dr. Fleming's statement discusses how the Medicare physician payment cuts slated for March 1, 2010 will affect everyone.*

"We're just four days from a Medicare meltdown in this great country. The effects of the Medicare disaster go far beyond Medicare patients. In fact, it could affect every single Texan. Here is why: Most health insurance companies base their payments to physicians on Medicare rates. In some cases, insurance companies reduce their rates every time Congress freezes or cuts physician Medicare rates. But they don't bother to freeze the premiums our patients and their employers are paying.

For the past nine years, the cost of running a doctor's office has increased dramatically. At the same time, what the government pays your doctor to care for Medicare patients has not kept pace. The flawed payment system is unsustainable. Since 2001, physicians' costs have gone up 20 percent more than physicians' Medicare payments. **In fact, come March 1, when the 21.2-percent cut goes into effect, physicians will receive less from Medicare than they currently receive from Medicaid. This is appalling because no one pays less than Medicaid.**

Physicians simply cannot keep their doors open with few paying patients. Physicians are sick. We want to take care of our patients. That's why we went to medical school in the first place. If Congress and President Obama truly want health system reform then they must fix the Medicare system. We need a rational Medicare physician payment system that automatically keeps up with the cost of running a practice and is backed by a fair, stable funding formula."

TMA is the largest state medical society in the nation, representing nearly 45,000 physician and medical student members. It is located in Austin and has 120 component county medical societies around the state. TMA's key objective since 1853 is to improve the health of all Texans.

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