



**A Coalition of 14 Medical Societies Representing
more than 200,000 Specialty Physicians in the United States**

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November 20, 2003

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned members of the Alliance of Specialty Medicine, a coalition of 14 medical societies representing more than 200,000 specialty physicians in the United States, urge you to support passage of S. 720 before the Senate adjourns for the year.

Specialist physicians strive to provide the best medical care to their patients. As in all other professions, however, errors can occur in the delivery of that care. Creating a health care environment that encourages the development of safety systems and eliminates the culture of blame is essential for improving patient safety. The legislation favorably passed out of the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee unanimously this summer would create a health care environment that encourages continuous safety improvements through the education of health care providers while ensuring that patient safety data is privileged and confidential, a vital component to encourage physicians to voluntarily participate in a safety system.

Voluntary sharing of information promotes and is often a prerequisite to improvements in health care quality at all levels of our complex, interconnected health care delivery system. This legislation appropriately provides for voluntary, non-identifiable reporting of patient safety data. The sharing of this information may enable qualified researchers to identify specific techniques and processes of care to improve outcomes. Furthermore, the legislation, while maintaining the confidentiality and legal protections of patient safety data, ensures that physicians and other health care providers are accountable for their actions and a patient's legal rights are not eroded.

Since 1999, when the Institute of Medicine issued their report "To Err is Human" we have been working to develop a viable error reporting system that would enable physicians, hospitals and other health care providers to collect information and hopefully reduce the frequency of medical errors. While many of our organizations have undertaken initiatives to help reduce the frequency of errors, we continue to wait for Congress to create a framework for the creation of patient safety organizations. We believe S. 720 accomplishes many of the goals set forth by the Institute of Medicine and urge you to pass this legislation before the end of the year.

American Academy of Dermatology Association • American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons • American College of Cardiology • American College of Emergency Physicians American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists • American College of Radiology Association
American Gastroenterological Association • American Society for Clinical Pathology
American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology • American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery
American Urological Association • National Association of Spine Specialists • Society of Thoracic Surgeons

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For further information, or if you have any questions, please contact the Chair of the Alliance of Specialty Medicine Patient Safety Workgroup, Ryan Erenhouse, at rerenhouse@smithbucklin.com or 202/367-1265.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Dermatology Association
American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Cardiology
American College of Emergency Physicians
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