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# Commentary

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## OPINION

Friday, August 25, 2006

### Medicare: An easy solution

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER EDITORIAL BOARD

We live in a complicated world -- and because of that many of our problems seem impossible.

Here is one problem that is easily solved: Congress needs to change the way it pays for kidney dialysis.

This story starts in the Northwest. Dr. Belding Scribner developed an innovative process in 1960 that made it possible to clean out toxic substances and excess fluids for people with kidney failure. The dialysis keeps people alive -- and working.

It's the working part that caught Congress' attention. Lawmakers made patients with end-stage renal disease eligible for Medicare.

So far so good. But there's always a "but." And in this case, it was that Congress did not make the payment schedule part of a regular Medicare review. It essentially takes an act of Congress to update the payment schedule. A GAO study two years ago found that Medicare payments did not meet the cost of service (especially when drugs and nursing services were added).

It's time for the easy solution. Congress needs to enact the Kidney Care Quality and Improvement Act before the end of this year. The bill would allow routine cost updates -- and provide money for better kidney education.

This region is served by a non-profit, the Northwest Kidney Centers, that created the first outpatient dialysis service in the nation. We're lucky. But we ought to make sure this resource, and others across the nation, receive adequate compensation for saving lives.

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