



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
October 7, 2009

**Contact:** Rebecca Reid  
410-212-3843

## **NBA-All Star Alonzo Mourning Joins Kidney Community in Urging Congress to Support Health Care Reform That Improves Choice, Access to Quality Dialysis Care, Builds on Quality Improvements**

*Washington, DC* – Seven-time NBA All-Star Alonzo Mourning joined with representatives of Kidney Care Partners on Capitol Hill today to educate lawmakers about kidney disease and ask for support for key health care reforms that will improve patient access and choice in receiving quality kidney care.

Mourning, a member of the 2006 NBA champion Miami Heat team, received a kidney transplant in 2003 after being diagnosed with Focal Glomerulosclerosis, a degenerative kidney disease, in 2000. Mourning returned to the NBA following his transplant and has since been an advocate for kidney patients nationwide. Mourning has partnered with Kidney Care Partners (KCP) -- an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, providers and manufacturers working together to improve the quality of care for individuals with end stage renal disease (ESRD) -- on several advocacy efforts on behalf of kidney patients.

During a KCP-sponsored briefing today, Mourning and KCP representatives discussed the importance of public policy changes that would positively affect patients with kidney disease, including an extension of the Medicare secondary payer provision, the development of accountable care organizations, and expanded coverage of immunosuppressant drugs for transplant patients.

Each year, more than 100,000 Americans are diagnosed with ESRD and require dialysis or a kidney transplant in order to survive. Today, approximately 527,000 patients in the United States are living with kidney failure, and a disproportionate number of these patients are minorities. African American, Hispanic and Asian patients make up more than half the ESRD patient population.

Medicare pays for the dialysis for a significant proportion of patients with kidney failure. However, as currently structured, Medicare's ESRD benefit forces patients off of their private insurance and onto Medicare after 30 months of dialysis. This discriminatory policy, which affects no other category of Medicare beneficiaries, is imposed regardless of patient preferences and even if private insurance plans offer more comprehensive coverage than Medicare.

John Davis, CEO of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), noted that estimates have shown that by extending MSP from 30 to 42 months, the resulting savings to Medicare could be used to pay for expanded immunosuppressant drug coverage. "Even a 12 month extension would provide \$1.2 billion in

savings to the government over ten years, according to the Congressional Budget Office,” said Davis. “Dialysis patients should have the same choices provided to other Medicare patients. They should be able to keep their private insurance as primary payer if they choose.”

Current Medicare policy limits coverage to life-saving immunosuppressant drugs at 36 months, restricting access to needed medications that can result in organ rejection if not taken appropriately. Extending immunosuppressive coverage beyond the 36-month limit would improve transplant outcomes.

"A profile of ESRD patients shows that, on average, patients have three co-morbidities, see three to five doctors on a regular basis and use an average of eight prescribed medications – strongly indicating the need for an integrated approach to their care,” said LaVarne Burton, CEO of the American Kidney Fund (AKF). “Overall, a coordinated delivery model that is transparent, and therefore accountable, improves quality, reduces hospitalizations and generates savings is a win for patients and for the government.”

Last year, Congress approved -- with the strong support of the kidney community -- provisions critical to improving care for patients with kidney disease and kidney failure. These provisions included the creation of patient education programs to help patients better manage their kidney disease to delay the onset of kidney failure, as well as prevention initiatives to educate Americans about how to avoid kidney disease and kidney failure.

“Because kidney disease and kidney failure are on the rise in communities all across the country, it’s critically important that we make a collective effort to ensure that all patients have access to the quality kidney care they need and deserve,” said Kent Thiry, Chairman of Kidney Care Partners. “In order to reach this goal, we are asking policymakers to support policies that will improve access and choice for all patients with kidney disease.”

###

*About Kidney Care Partners*

*Kidney Care Partners is an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, providers and manufacturers working together to improve the quality of care for individuals with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). For more information, visit [www.kidneycarepartners.org](http://www.kidneycarepartners.org).*