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Kidney Care Community Applauds National Taxpayers Union’s Endorsement of Medicare Reforms to Extend Patient Private Health Insurance Coverage; Calls Proposal “Common Sense Coverage Reform”

In Letter to Senate Finance Committee, Taxpayers Union Says Extending Private Coverage for Dialysis Patients from 30 to 60 Months is Key to Improving Care and Generating Taxpayer Savings

WASHINGTON (April 28, 2008) – Kidney Care Partners (KCP) – an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, care providers and manufacturers working together to improve quality of care for individuals with kidney disease and kidney failure – applauded the National Taxpayers Union’s (NTU’s) April 24 letter to the Senate Finance Committee supporting Medicare policy changes that would extend the period of private insurance coverage for beneficiaries suffering from kidney failure. NTU called these reforms (historically referred to as Medicare Secondary Payer or MSP) an example of a “Common Sense Coverage Reform.”

In a nine-page submission to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT), Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Members of the Committee addressing Medicare issues ranging from funding oversight and accountability measures to systemic changes, the NTU called out Patient Coverage Extension (PCE) for patients on dialysis as a “small but sensible step” Congress can undertake to control ballooning Medicare costs and deliver savings to taxpayers, thereby helping avoid unnecessary tax hikes or government bailouts.

Dialysis patients are the only Medicare beneficiaries forced to switch from their private health insurance to Medicare after 30 months of treatment, regardless of their age. Doing so can lead to unnecessary confusion and a lack of treatment options for patients, as well as higher costs for taxpayers covering the rising costs of Medicare. The Bush Administration has recently proposed extending private coverage for ESRD patients from 30 to 60 months.

“Kidney Care Partners is encouraged by the National Taxpayers Union’s support of extending private coverage as a reasonable and achievable goal for delivering expanded choice for ESRD patients and recognizable savings for Medicare,” said Edward Jones, M.D., Chairman of Kidney Care Partners. “We hope Congress will recognize the importance of enacting this critical reform – which could greatly advance patient care for a portion of the ESRD patient population and deliver more than \$1 billion in savings over the next five years to improve the ESRD benefit – as it examines Medicare reform proposals in coming weeks.”

Each year, more than 100,000 Americans are diagnosed with End Stage Renal Disease and require dialysis or a kidney transplant in order to survive. Today, approximately 485,000 patients

in the United States are living with kidney failure, and that number is expected to double in the next decade due to a dramatic rise in diabetes – the number one cause of kidney disease – as well as co-morbid conditions such as high blood pressure and obesity.

According to 2007 Congressional Budget Office data, extending private coverage from 30 to 60 months would save Medicare \$1.02 billion over five years and \$3.07 billion over 10 years. Extending coverage from 30 to 42 months, as proposed in the 2007 Children’s Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act, would save \$400 million over five years and \$1.2 billion over 10 years. Although NTU opposed the CHAMP Act in its final form, it supports certain provisions of the bill – such as PCE – as being beneficial in controlling Medicare costs.

While some critics of PCE have charged that it would shift greater costs to employers, recent market analyses maintain that only about 3 percent – approximately 8,100 kidney patients nationally – would be affected by the policy. The NTU commentary stated that such a cost shift to employers would not remain for long, if at all, and that “the fiscal pluses to taxpayers would be direct and substantial, and the effect on health insurance costs would be less significant.”

“We are pleased with the NTU’s recognition of extending private coverage for patients as smart policy, and we look forward to educating additional lawmakers, policy thought leaders, patient advocates and others in the coming weeks about the benefits of this much-needed reform,” said Dr. Jones. “On behalf of front-line dialysis professionals, care providers, patient advocates and the patients we serve, we are dedicated to becoming and remaining a resource on this important issue until change is achieved.”

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About Kidney Care Partners

Kidney Care Partners is an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, care providers and manufacturers working together to improve quality of care for individuals with kidney disease and kidney failure. For more information, visit www.kidneycarepartners.org.