

Measures would help hospices

by: JIM MYERS World Washington Bureau
3/7/2008 12:00 AM

The aim is to keep Medicare and Medicaid from demanding money from hospices for patients who require lengthy hospice care.

WASHINGTON -- Two Oklahoma lawmakers introduced bills Thursday that they say would save hospices from financial ruin and their terminally ill patients from being denied care or forced into more costly options.

Legislation by U.S. Sen. Inhofe and U.S. Rep. John Sullivan, both Republicans, would place a three-year moratorium on the federal government's efforts to collect overpayments on patients whose hospice care exceeds federal caps. Collection efforts began several years ago.

"I have been working since early 2007 to help small, community hospices in Oklahoma as they face re payment letters from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for millions of dollars," Inhofe said. "Because of a flawed law, the federal government is requiring hospices to repay CMS for serving eligible patients in prior years."

Sullivan said 40 percent of Oklahoma's hospices have hit the cap.

"Without a moratorium, many hospices will be unable to meet demands for repayment and will be forced to close," he said. "Oklahoma's Medicare seniors deserve to have a choice in their end-of-life care and this legislation will ensure that they continue to have their say."

Last year, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., asked the Senate Finance Committee to include a moratorium in its Medicare legislation, but his press office said Thursday that the committee took no action on that request.

"Our legislative staff is not optimistic at this point," press aide Chris Gallegos said.

Inhofe's and Sullivan's bills also call for the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission to study the issue.

Initiated in 1982, the Medi care benefit pays hospices a flat fee for care but places a cap on the number of days for such payments.

Few hospices reportedly reached the cap in the past, but with changes in the program designed to ensure that eligible patients had access to care, regardless of diagnosis, more hospices began exceeding the cap.

Asked about the cost of Sullivan's bill, his office said it is trying to get that information.

Jim Myers (202) 484-1424
jim.myers@tulsaworld.com

Associate Images:



U.S. Rep. John Sullivan



U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe

Copyright © 2008, World Publishing Co. All rights reserved

[Return to Story](#)