

October 29, 2024

The Derm Coalition town hall addressed significant challenges in healthcare reimbursement, especially regarding Medicare. Participants, including coalition leader Clay Cockerell, MD, voiced concerns over flat or declining reimbursement rates from Medicare, which he argued could threaten the viability of practices and limit patient access to care. The discussion highlighted the need for a stronger, more unified voice among physicians and proposed both immediate actions and long-term strategies to address these issues.

### **Key Discussion Points:**

1. **Unionization and Collective Bargaining:** Many attendees suggested forming a physician union or coalition across specialties to enable collective bargaining with Medicare and private insurers.
2. **Legislative and Political Advocacy:** Emphasis was placed on improving influence in Congress through increased, targeted political contributions and aligning with physician advocates in Congress. Participants proposed forming advocacy groups similar to those private insurers and pharmaceutical companies used to influence policy changes.
3. **Public and Patient Awareness Campaigns:** There was broad support for campaigns to raise awareness among patients and the public about the potential impact of reduced reimbursement on healthcare access. Ideas included social media campaigns, national commercials, and outreach to influential organizations like AARP to educate and mobilize the public.
4. **Legal and Structural Reforms:** Legal avenues were explored, such as challenging antitrust laws preventing collective bargaining by physicians and investigating possible actions against private insurer monopolies to improve negotiating power.

### **Proposed Next Steps:**

1. **Expand Outreach and Engagement:**
  - a. Create a Facebook group or similar online platform to continue conversations, share updates, and organize efforts across specialties.
  - b. Reach out to larger physician groups, such as the Facebook Physician Community (with 80,000+ members), to increase involvement and build momentum.
  - c. Engage patients and patient advocacy groups in the conversation to strengthen the message and gain public support.
2. **Develop a Cohesive Message:**
  - a. Create and test compelling, targeted messages to share on social media, within medical practices, and in public awareness campaigns. Emphasize the impact of reimbursement cuts on patient care access and the broader healthcare system.

- b. Identify and develop data points that demonstrate the real cost of flat reimbursements and explain the broader economic and ethical implications for the healthcare industry.
- 3. Pursue Funding and Legal Expertise:
  - a. Explore forming a coalition PAC (Political Action Committee) to support targeted political advocacy and increase lobbying power.
  - b. Identify legal experts to evaluate potential actions against antitrust limitations and investigate legal pathways to organize or collectively bargain within the current regulatory environment.
- 4. Plan Regular Meetings and Action Items:
  - a. Host monthly or bi-monthly town halls to track progress, share developments, and maintain engagement.
  - b. Form a small committee of interested attendees to drive the coalition's efforts between meetings, focusing on key goals such as legislative outreach, media strategy, and patient advocacy.

By following these steps, the coalition aims to build a more organized and powerful advocacy network, with both physician and public support, to advocate for sustainable reimbursement practices and ensure accessible patient care. The next meeting will be scheduled within a month to six weeks to review progress and refine strategies.

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