

Improve Rural Access to Anesthesiology Medical Care: Support Rural “pass-through” Legislation – H.R. 2204 “Medicare Access to Rural Anesthesiology Act”

ISSUE

In the 1980s, a provision was put in place—as a rural provider incentive—that would allow certain rural hospitals to use a more generous Medicare Part A pass-through arrangement to pay for the services of anesthesiologist assistants (AAs) and nurse anesthetists only. However, current law does not permit these rural hospitals to use “pass-through” funds to employ or contract with anesthesiologists.

H.R. 2204, introduced by Reps. Henry Cuellar (D-TX) and Todd Akin (R-MO), would broaden the policy and allow rural hospitals to use pass-through funds for anesthesiologists, as well as AAs and nurse anesthetists. ASA strongly supports this legislation.

PROBLEM

- Congress has consistently worked to expand the availability of physicians in rural America. There is an ongoing need for new and revised policies that encourage physicians to practice in these underserved areas.
- The current pass-through arrangement discourages hospitals from contracting with anesthesiologists.
- In 2002, when CMS increased the surgical volume cap for eligible rural hospitals from 500 to 800, ASA requested that CMS permit the use of rural hospital pass-through payments to anesthesiologists as well as AAs and nurse anesthetists. CMS responded that it cannot permit hospitals to use pass-through funds for anesthesiologists without legislative action.

CONGRESSIONAL REQUEST

Please cosponsor H.R. 2204, legislation that would allow rural hospitals to use Medicare pass-through funds to contract with physician anesthesiologists, as well as AAs and nurse anesthetists. This would help ensure broader availability of anesthesiology medical care in rural America.

Anesthesiologists: Physicians providing the lifeline of modern medicine. Founded in 1905, the American Society of Anesthesiologists is an educational, research and scientific association with 43,000 members organized to raise and maintain the standards of the medical practice of anesthesiology and improve the care of the patient.

For more information visit the American Society of Anesthesiologists website at www.ASAhq.org.