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Rep. Smith Champions Medicare Home Health Flexibility Act

JULY 30TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Missouri Representative introduces legislation to reduce Medicare red tape and improve access to home health therapy services

Washington, D.C. - This week U.S. Rep. Jason Smith (MO-Dist. 8) introduced the Medicare Home Health Flexibility Act (H.R. 6225), which will eliminate an unnecessary Medicare restriction and allow occupational therapists to open home health therapy cases. The Missouri Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA) joined the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) in thanking Rep. Smith for championing the bill which will eliminate home health scheduling delays and result in improved client access to therapy services.

“This bill would eliminate a Medicare restriction that is needlessly burdensome on patients and home health therapy providers,” said Rep. Smith. “It will increase access to care and doesn’t cost the government a penny.”

Smith represents a large district in Southern and Southeastern Missouri. He serves as a member of the House Ways and Means Committee that is reviewing proposals to reduce Medicare red tape and increase access for Medicare patients.

“The bill will improve access for all home health clients in Missouri and nationwide

by making a simple change that has wide support in the overall therapy community,” said Jacquelyn M. Sample, DrOT, M.Ed., OTR/L, President of MOTA. MOTA represents the approximately 5,300 occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants and students preparing to enter practice in Missouri.

“Therapists can drive 100-200 miles per day when serving clients in this part of Missouri, and current restrictions mean that home health therapy services are often delayed if the agency does not have a physical therapist or speech language pathologist available to initiate services on a given day,” said AOTA/MOTA member Rhonda Wolfe Hutsell, MSOT, OTR/L, CLT, and OT with Salem Memorial District Hospital in Salem, MO.

Occupational therapy has long been a valued component of home health care due to therapists’ expertise in identifying home safety issues and in establishing routines to maximize a client’s ability to follow his or her plan of care. This legislation recognizes those contributions and seeks to address the arbitrary restrictions currently in place.

Amy J. Lamb, OTD, OT/L, FAOTA, President of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), called the bill a “win-win” for beneficiaries, the health care system, and policy makers because it increases access to services for Medicare beneficiaries, increases efficiency, and is a valuable investment of financial resources to support independent living without increasing costs. “As baby boomers continue to age, so does the increased desire to age in place,” said Lamb. “Simultaneously, the evolving health care system emphasizes increasing quality and efficiency, and decreasing costs. As a result, more patients are receiving care in their home or community where occupational therapy has a pivotal role in facilitating participation and engagement in their everyday life, and enhancing quality of life while aging in place.”

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office’s analysis reported the bill would not increase any federal spending.

Founded in 1917, AOTA represents the professional interests and concerns of more than 213,000 occupational therapists, assistants, and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations, and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA’s major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize

their individual potential. For more information, visit www.aota.org.

LAST UPDATED ON JULY 30TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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