

UPDATE

neurosurgery

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Neurosurgeons Join Coalition in Raising Alarm about Prior Authorization in Medicare *Expanding prior authorization will unnecessarily delay patient access to care.*

Washington, DC—The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) joined a diverse coalition of 40 state and national health care organizations [reiterating their strong opposition](#) to the expansion of prior authorization in Medicare. Prior authorization is a cumbersome process that requires physicians to obtain pre-approval for medical treatments or tests before rendering care to their patients. The process for obtaining this approval is burdensome and time-consuming. As a result, patients experience significant barriers to medically necessary care, even for treatments and tests that are eventually routinely approved.

Despite the demonstrated problems with prior authorization, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has inappropriately expanded its use in Medicare’s fee-for-service program. Last year, CMS established a nationwide prior authorization process to include critical spine services — cervical fusion with disc removal and implanted spinal neurostimulators — provided in hospital outpatient departments. Over the objections of the [AANS and the CNS, 50 bipartisan members of Congress](#) and others, the new requirements go live on July 1.

The AANS and the CNS are concerned that CMS is expanding prior authorization without the necessary guardrails to protect beneficiaries’ access to care, thus delaying or preventing time-sensitive spine procedures. In the letter, the coalition urges the agency to delay the implementation of prior authorization for these spine services and halt any further expansion of prior authorization until CMS:

- Conducts a thorough analysis of the impact of prior authorization for the five procedures last year; and
- Establishes specific criteria to guide its decision-making related to the use of prior authorization.

“Neurosurgeons care for patients who suffer from painful and life-threatening neurologic conditions, and prior authorization is causing unacceptable delays and denials of medical treatments, particularly for debilitating spine disorders. Our patients cannot afford to wait or jump through unnecessary hoops to get the care they need, so it is imperative that CMS reevaluate the use of prior authorization in Medicare,” said **John K. Ratliff**, MD, FAANS, FACS, a neurosurgeon from Stanford, Calif., and chair of the AANS/CNS Washington Committee.

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The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), founded in 1931, and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals in the world. These groups represent over 8,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit www.aans.org or www.cns.org, read our blog www.neurosurgeryblog.org, follow us on [Twitter](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#).