

UPDATE

# neurosurgery

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Neurosurgeons Raise the Alarm about Medicare’s Proposed Physician Fee Schedule**

*Proposed payment cuts undermine patient care and will further strain a health care system already weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Washington, DC—Today, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) announced their strong opposition to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule proposed rule released by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for calendar year 2021. Under the proposal, neurosurgeons face overall payment cuts of at least 7% at a time when the nation’s health care system is already stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The reductions are primarily driven by new Medicare payment policies for office and outpatient visits that CMS will implement on January 1, 2021. Drastic cuts caused by changes to these visit codes — also known as evaluation and management (E/M) codes — will undermine patient access to neurosurgical care.

“Now is not the time to reduce payments for surgical care, and if implemented as is, the Medicare payment rule will challenge an already fragile health care system,” said **Ann R. Stroink, MD, FAANS**, a practicing neurosurgeon from Bloomington, Illinois, and chair of the AANS/CNS Washington Committee.

As founding members of the [Surgical Care Coalition](#), the AANS and CNS are working to stop these planned Medicare payment cuts. Specifically, the groups are asking Congress to waive Medicare’s budget neutrality requirements to prevent the cuts and to require CMS to apply the increased E/M payment adjustments to all 10- and 90-day global surgery codes. A recent survey conducted by the coalition found that neurosurgical practices are facing severe financial distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the CMS cuts take effect, the survey found that:

- More than one-half (54%) of respondents are concerned that they could be forced to shut down their practice, limiting choice and access to neurosurgical care;
- Three-quarters (74%) of neurosurgeons are concerned about the finances of their practice, and to keep the doors open, 38% have cut their own salary, and one-quarter (24%) have taken on debt as a result of COVID-19; and
- In the face of declining revenues, 86% of respondents are worried that they will have to cut employee’s salaries and 76% fear that they may have to permanently layoff employees.

“This was an ill-informed and dangerous policy for patients even before the pandemic started but could be even more detrimental as our health care system continues to weaken under COVID-19. If finalized, this proposal could result in neurosurgeons taking fewer Medicare patients leading to longer wait times and reduced access to care for older Americans, so Congress must act now to prevent this from happening,” Dr. Stroink concluded.

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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](http://www.aans.org) or [www.cns.org](http://www.cns.org), read our blog [www.neurosurgeryblog.org](http://www.neurosurgeryblog.org), follow us on [Twitter](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#).*