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Kidney Care Community Commends Congressional Black Caucus for Naming Expansion of Medicare Provisions for Kidney Failure Patients as Top Priority

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NBA-All Star Alonzo Mourning, Kidney Care Partners Call Attention to Extended Medicare Secondary Payer Policy as Cost-Saving Reform to Improve Patient Access to Quality Care

WASHINGTON, Oct. 12 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Kidney Care Partners - an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, care providers and manufacturers working together to improve quality of care for individuals with kidney disease and kidney failure - today applauded the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for supporting reforms that will improve patient access and choice in receiving quality kidney care. In an October 7 letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), the CBC identified the expansion of Medicare Secondary Payer (MSP) provisions in the End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) benefit - estimated by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to save Medicare \$1.2 billion over 10 years - as a top priority to be included in healthcare reform legislation.

"We applaud the Congressional Black Caucus for their leadership in advancing policies that will improve access and choice for all patients with kidney disease," said Kent Thiry, Chairman of Kidney Care Partners. "As kidney disease and kidney failure continue to rise, particularly among minority populations, reforms supported by the CBC are even more critical."

The letter to Speaker Pelosi followed a breakfast meeting in which members of the CBC met with seven-time NBA All-Star player and kidney transplant recipient Alonzo Mourning to discuss the importance of public policy changes that would positively affect patients with kidney disease, including an extension of the Medicare Secondary Payer provision and expanded coverage of immunosuppressive drugs for transplant patients.

Medicare pays for dialysis treatment for a significant proportion of patients with kidney failure. However, as currently structured, Medicare's ESRD benefit forces patients off of their private insurance and onto Medicare after 30 months of dialysis. This discriminatory policy, which affects no other category of Medicare beneficiaries, is imposed regardless of patient preferences and even if private insurance plans offer more comprehensive coverage than Medicare.

Estimates from the CBO have shown that extending MSP from 30 to 42 months would result in Medicare

savings of \$1.2 billion over ten years, which could be used to pay for expanded immunosuppressant drug coverage. Current Medicare policy limits coverage to life-saving immunosuppressant drugs to 36 months, restricting access to needed medications that can prevent organ rejection. Extending immunosuppressive coverage beyond the 36-month limit would improve transplant outcomes and provide this life-saving treatment option to an increased number of kidney failure patients.

A disproportionate number of kidney disease and kidney failure patients are African American, due to high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, leading risk factors for chronic kidney disease (CKD). Approximately 32 percent of all patients who experience kidney failure in the United States are African American, yet they only make up about 12 percent of the nation's population. Today, more than 527,000 patients in the United States are living with kidney failure, and require dialysis or a kidney transplant in order to survive.

Mourning, a member of the Miami Heat's 2006 NBA championship team, received a kidney transplant in 2003 after being diagnosed with Focal Glomerulosclerosis, a degenerative kidney disease, in 2000. Mourning returned to the NBA following his transplant and has since been an advocate for kidney patients nationwide.

About Kidney Care Partners

Kidney Care Partners is an alliance of patient advocates, dialysis professionals, providers and manufacturers working together to improve the quality of care for individuals with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). For more information, visit www.kidneycarepartners.org.

SOURCE Kidney Care Partners

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