



Supporting Quality Health Care Services at Home

Special Alert

June 13, 2002

Message from AAHomecare Chairman Steven Knoll

Congress Must Hear from **YOU** on Competitive Bidding

Thank you for electing me as Chairman of the association. One of my goals is to communicate with members, state organizations, and coalition partners often and with straight talk about what we need to do as an industry. My first request is to contact your elected representatives NOW about competitive bidding, which threatens the economic stability of this industry.

Key House committee staff made one thing very clear during last week's AAHomecare Washington Legislative Conference – proposed legislation WILL contain a provision that implements national competitive bidding for home medical equipment. Despite limited data from the two demonstration programs and well-documented concerns presented by AAHomecare and its coalition partners, committee staff support competitive bidding as a means to help finance a prescription drug program and givebacks to other health care sectors.

National competitive bidding was also the focus of a hearing yesterday, held by the Labor and HHS Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, chaired by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA). Although the focus of the hearing was the Office of Inspector General (OIG) report that concluded that Medicare pays too much for home medical equipment as compared to the Veterans Administration, it provided an opportunity for CMS Administrator Tom Scully to discuss implementation of competitive bidding. Although Mr. Scully said that the Bush Administration favors competitive bidding, he acknowledged that it would take significant resources to implement and would have to be structured so that small businesses were not driven from the marketplace. Mr. Scully also announced that he has approved a regulation to implement Inherent Reasonableness (IR), which is working its way through the Administration.

AAHomecare and its coalition partners submitted testimony, and Invacare's Dave Williams testified, all noting the complexity of the Medicare program versus the VA.

Since national competitive bidding now has the public's attention, with stories in *USA Today* and on the network news programs of NBC and ABC, it is vital that you educate your elected representatives about the potential quality and access issues associated with it. Although AAHomecare members made more than 160 Capitol Hill visits and dropped off packets to another 200 Congressional offices, your elected representatives need to hear from you **AND THE CUSTOMERS YOU SERVE**. We had about a dozen consumers and their caregivers involved last week, and when they spoke about their concerns, Members

of Congress and their staffs listened. In fact, I'm pleased to announce that one of the leading advocates for people with disabilities – Senator Max Cleland (D-GA) – has committed to helping us.

Here's a list of what every member needs to do NOW:

- Visit www.aahomecare.org and click into the Competitive Bidding section on the home page for AAHomecare's position paper and talking points on competitive bidding. Through the Capitol Connection link on the home page, or by visiting <http://capitol.medgroup.com>, you can also locate your elected representative, select a sample message you wish to send, and email it directly. If you need any help, just contact AAHomecare's Katie Musson at katiem@aaahomecare.org or 703-836-6263.
- In any communication, whether faxed or emailed, identify that you are a small business, the number of Medicare patients you serve, and the home health equipment and services you provide. Ensure to offer to host your Member of Congress in a visit to your facility when they are back in the district, and share your letter with the local office of your representative so they are aware of this request.
- Encourage your customers to contact Congress to express their quality and access concerns, or collect letters from your customers and send these to your elected representative. A sample message about competitive bidding is available through the Capitol Connection Web site.

I know that you are busy, but we are literally in the fight of our economic lives. Although every speaker at last week's conference noted how effective AAHomecare has been on Capitol Hill, **Congress needs to hear from YOU as business owners and professional health care providers concerned about the quality of and access to the care you provide to Medicare beneficiaries. They also need to hear from your customers.**

Please help. I look forward to working with all of you this year. If you have any comments, feel free to email me at sknoll@knollnet.com.