



A PATIENT-CENTERED FORUM OF NATIONAL ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES IN CANCER

April 19, 2002

Dear Senator/Representative:

As organizations representing cancer patients, providers, and researchers committed to ensuring access to quality cancer care for all people with cancer, we are writing to urge that a final version of the “Nurse Reinvestment Act” be developed immediately to ensure this important legislation can be signed into law by the President this year. In addition, we ask that the final version of the measure include the Senate-passed provisions (S. 1864) which prove comprehensive and provide additional resources and programmatic solutions. The House-passed bill takes important steps forward in addressing the challenges posed by the nursing shortage and we commend both the House and the Senate for taking swift action in passing bills late last year. By taking decisive action now with enactment of comprehensive legislation that seeks to stem the tide of the nursing shortage, we can help ensure that the cancer patients of tomorrow have access to the quality care they need and deserve.

As you know, a nursing shortage, the likes of which we have never seen, is anticipated to peak in the next ten years. This nursing shortage will have a significant and adverse effect on our nation’s ability to deliver much-needed care to Medicare beneficiaries, especially those with cancer. Despite significant breakthroughs in the treatment, early detection, and prevention of cancer, two-thirds of new cancer cases strike people over the age of 65 and the number of new cancer cases diagnosed among the elderly is projected to more than double by 2030 as the Baby Boom generation ages. The impact that cancer has on our nation, especially on the Medicare Program, cannot be underestimated or overlooked. More than 115,000 nursing positions will go unfilled by the year 2015 - a factor which further exacerbates the challenge of a growing number of cancer cases.

Cancer is a complex, multifaceted chronic disease, and people with cancer require specialty-nursing interventions at every step of the cancer experience. People with cancer are best served by nurses specialized in oncology care who are certified in that specialty. We are very concerned the nursing shortage will result in an insufficient number of nurses trained in oncology which in turn, will impede the provision of quality cancer care exactly at the time when more and more people unfortunately will need such specialized health care services. To that end, we are hopeful that many of the newly available grants and scholarships will be awarded to individuals seeking nursing careers in oncology. We especially are hopeful that this legislation will help attract, train, and retain research nurses who are pivotal to completion of clinical trials that lead to better treatments. Moreover, we encourage Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services to take specific steps to encourage individuals seeking a career in nursing to enter these essential nursing specialties.

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We must take steps now to assure that intelligent young people view nursing as a desirable career, and have access to training for such a career. In particular, we must ensure that nurses who choose to specialize in oncology have the ability to do so. While both the House and Senate measures take important steps in addressing the problem, the Senate bill includes the resources and remedies necessary to ensure that we will have an adequate and well-trained nursing workforce well into the 21st century. Specifically, the Senate bill expands education and training for current nurses, establishes a National Nurse Service Corps, creates career ladder programs, provides grants for nursing training in long-term eldercare, and offers incentives for students to seek masters or doctoral degrees at schools of nursing. These programs will benefit all nurses, including those currently in - and interested in entering - oncology and clinical research.

On behalf of people with cancer and those who will be diagnosed in the future, we appreciate your attention to this important public health matter and thank you in advance for working with your colleagues to ensure that the most comprehensive version possible of the "Nurse Reinvestment Act" is signed into law by the President this year.

Cancer Leadership Council

Alliance for Lung Cancer Advocacy, Support,
and Education
American Cancer Society
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society for Therapeutic Radiology
and Oncology, Inc.
Association of American Cancer Institutes
Cancer Research Foundation of America
The Children's Cause, Inc.
Coalition of National Cancer Cooperative
Groups
Colorectal Cancer Network
The Foundation for the Children's Oncology
Group
International Myeloma Foundation

Kidney Cancer Association
Lymphoma Research Foundation
Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation
National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
National Prostate Cancer Coalition
North American Brain Tumor Coalition
Oncology Nursing Society
Ovarian Cancer National Alliance
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer
Foundation
US TOO! International, Inc.
The Wellness Community
Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization

cc. House Energy & Commerce Committee
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
The Honorable Tom Daschle
The Honorable Edward Kennedy
The Honorable Trent Lott
The Honorable Dennis Hastert
The Honorable Richard Gephardt