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October 5, 2009

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Society of Nephrology (ASN), thank you for the important work you have done thus far in advocating for meaningful health reform that will improve the quality of life for all Americans. ASN, a not-for-profit organization of 11,000 physicians and scientists dedicated to helping nephrologists provide the highest quality of patient care possible, applauds these efforts.

In particular, ASN commends the House for including the provisions of H.R. 1458, a bill to extend immunosuppressive drug coverage for kidney transplant patients, in America's Affordable Health Choices Act, H.R. 3200. Maintaining lifetime immunosuppressive drug coverage is one of the biggest challenges transplant recipients face today. H.R. 3200 provides comprehensive coverage for anti-rejection medications, which would prevent unnecessary organ rejection and enable more patients without adequate insurance to consider transplantation.

Currently, the Medicare ESRD program pays for the majority of kidney transplants, but only covers 36 months of post-transplant immunosuppressive drug coverage for patients who do not qualify for Medicare due to age or disability. Many of these recipients later find themselves unable to purchase the drugs through insurance or self-pay; their bodies reject the new kidney and they must return to dialysis. If the transplant fails, Medicare incurs an average first year cost of more than \$100,000 and pays for a second transplant or a return to dialysis. Medicare spends \$71,000 per year on every dialysis patient in the U.S., and covers this care indefinitely.

Other dialysis patients may not even consider transplantation because they fear they will be unable to afford the drugs at the end of the 36 months. However, protecting a kidney transplant by paying for anti-rejection medication costs Medicare approximately \$17,000 per year—less than a quarter of the annual per-patient cost of dialysis.

H.R. 3200 would ensure the availability of anti-rejection drugs to all ESRD patients, expanding access to the most appropriate, cost-effective treatment options for all individuals and protecting Medicare's investments in kidney transplants.

On behalf of ASN's 11,000 members, I urge you to fight to keep these important immunosuppressive drug coverage provisions in the final version of health reform legislation as Congress moves toward reconciliation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Coffman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas Coffman, MD  
President, American Society of Nephrology