ASN
THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEPHROLOGY
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Dear Senator:

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.

However, it is imperative that health reform legislation include the provisions of S. 565, The Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act of 2009. Maintaining lifetime immunosuppressive drug coverage is one of the biggest challenges transplant recipients face today. This bill provides comprehensive coverage for anti-rejection medications, which would prevent unnecessary organ rejection and enable 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.

S. 565 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. The House of Representatives has already included companion provisions to S. 565 in "America's Affordable Health Act," H.R. 3200; it is vital that the Senate support this measure as well.

On behalf of ASN's 11,000 members, I urge you to support S. 565 and advocate for including its provisions in health reform legislation.

Sincerely,

Thomas Coffman
President, American Society of Nephrology