

American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine

Advancing the Science of Comfort ~ Affirming the Art of Caring

September 20, 2004

Honorable Ron Wyden 516 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

I am writing on behalf of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine to express our strong support for the "Palliative Care Training Act." Thank you for your leadership in this area and for your support of palliative care. We believe this legislation will strengthen the Medicare hospice benefit by improving health professional education related to hospice and palliative medicine.

The Hospice and Palliative Care Academic Career Awards (PACA) that your legislation seeks to establish would provide federal support for junior faculty to better equip them to train health care professionals in hospice care and palliative medicine.

There is a tremendous need for better medical education regarding palliative care. Two recent Institute of Medicine reports concluded that there are grave deficiencies in the care provided to children and adults with life limiting illnesses. The National Cancer Policy Board emphasized in their recent report, that many patients suffer from preventable pain and psychological distress.

The lack of education health care providers receive regarding hospice and palliative care contributes to this problem. Many doctors graduate from medical school ill-prepared to deal with the physical, psychological or communications issues that arise in patients with complex, life-limiting illnesses. Recent studies reveal that the majority of residents in Internal Medicine do not feel competent to provide good palliative care.

A recent report by the International Longevity Center reviewed the data and concluded, "There is a paucity of academic faculty physician specialists in the field capable of teaching medical students and residents the requisite knowledge and skills to provide effective palliative care. Consequently, seriously ill patients in the United States are subject to poor pain management and inappropriate or invasive medical interventions. Moreover, their physicians are not trained to help them or their families deal with the psychological, emotional, and spiritual issues that accompany life threatening illnesses."

Your bill will have a major impact on this situation. Supporting expert junior faculty who wish to focus their career on palliative care education will help ensure that all physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers receive adequate education regarding how to provide good palliative care.

AAHPM appreciates both your and Stephanie Kennan's willingness to work with us and to draw on our expertise in the field of palliative care as you drafted the "Palliative Care Training Act." AAHPM is the leading physician-based professional organization dedicated to advancing practice, research, and education in hospice and palliative medicine. The mission of the Academy is to advance the practice of palliative medicine by preventing and relieving patient and family suffering by providing education and clinical practice standards, fostering research, facilitating personal and professional development, and by public policy advocacy

We strongly support the establishment of a program to promote academic career development for individuals in palliative medicine. We hope to continue working with you to broaden its applicability to include all appropriately trained individuals. We are convinced this bill will improve quality palliative care for the millions of Americans who need it and look forward to working with you to ensure the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

James Cleary, MD President