



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE

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May 23, 2002

The Honorable William M. Thomas
U. S. House of Representatives
2208 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Thomas:

I am writing on behalf of the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) regarding the issue of competitive bidding in health care. The AARC is a national association representing approximately 32,000 respiratory therapists who practice in all health care settings.

Homebound Medicare patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD – i.e., emphysema and chronic bronchitis) and other pulmonary diseases require a range of equipment including oxygen cylinders, flow meters, oxygen pressure regulators, liquid oxygen systems, oxygen concentrators, and mechanical ventilators. Since these items require periodic performance checks and maintenance, the technical service component tied to this equipment is indispensable.

If respiratory patients are to be assured of the safe and effective use of this equipment, several technical service issues must be addressed including:

- Patient and caregiver education, training, and support on the use of the equipment;
- Timely service in the event equipment is not functioning properly;
- Access to backup equipment;
- Period system check and maintenance of equipment;
- Assessment of the home environment to determine proper use of the equipment, and
- Evaluation of patient compliance with equipment use.

Medically complex respiratory patients rely on the continued use of this equipment in order to live or, at the very least, maintain their quality of life. These patients depend on technical equipment services. Not recognizing and accounting for this need compromises patient safety and quality of care.

The AARC is concerned that the care environment created by competitive bidding will make it unaffordable for DME suppliers to provide the services required by respiratory patients using this equipment. **Absent a mandate by Congress to include technical equipment services, the AARC recommends that this equipment be excluded from the competitive bidding process.**

As Congress prepares to consider the issue of competitive bidding on a national level, the AARC urges that the goal of saving Medicare funds through competitive bidding not compromise patient care.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this issue that affects many of Medicare's older and more medically frail patients. If we can provide additional information, please contact me or Jill Eicher, AARC's Director of Government Affairs at 703-548-8538.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Traband".

Margaret F. Traband, MEd, RRT
President