

SAMPLE OP-ED:

Health care is at its best when patients are getting the right care at the right time, and in the right setting. And when it comes to serious illness, such as a stroke, transplant or broken hip, the road to recovery can be long but with intensive rehabilitation patients return home stronger, healthier -- ready to resume their daily activities and enjoy a high quality of life.

Today, access to this essential care provided by rehabilitation hospitals and units is being threatened by a misguided federal regulation called the “75% Rule.” The 75% Rule is bad policy for many reasons. It fails to take into consideration medical advances and therefore denies many patients, such as cancer or cardiac patients, needed intensive hospital rehabilitation delaying their return to previous levels of independence and activity. Instead, the rule requires a majority of hospital rehab patients be treated for one of 13 specific conditions.

Of greater concern is the fact that patients are being denied vital medical rehabilitation. In essence, rehab hospitals are forced to use this “75% Rule” to determine patient’s eligibility for care rather than the patient’s actual medical condition.

An additional roadblock to access is local coverage determinations (LCDs)—arbitrary regulatory interpretations of Medicare policy which further stretch scarce hospital resources and threaten patient access to medical rehabilitation. Patients deserve to have important medical care decisions made based on their independent clinical needs, not through a “one size fits all” policy.

Members of Congress have recognized the need to protect access to rehabilitative care and have introduced legislation to prevent the full implementation of the 75 Percent Rule. The “Preserving Patient Access to Inpatient Rehabilitation Hospitals Act of 2007” ensures that appropriate medical standards are being used when determining the best care setting for patients in need of rehabilitative care. Please encourage our members of Congress to support this legislation.

Health decisions should be left in the hands of doctors, nurses and other caregivers, not made through arbitrary and burdensome regulations. We need health policy that preserves access to care that helps patients heal and get back to activities of daily living. They deserve nothing less than the best.