

October 30, 2020

The Honorable Joni Ernst
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

On behalf of our physician and medical student members, the American Medical Association (AMA) is writing to express our support for S. 3353, the “Comprehensive Immunosuppressive Drug Coverage for Kidney Transplant Patients Act of 2020.” For far too long, kidney transplant patients faced a drop-off in coverage of their lifesaving immunosuppressive medications after 36 months. Without a justifiable reason, this time limit on these essential drugs has stayed in effect for more than a decade. By your leadership, this bill corrects that arbitrary timeframe and extends coverage of these immunosuppressive drugs for the life of the transplant recipient, providing the best opportunity to extend the effectiveness of the transplanted kidney.

Modern medicine and complementary therapeutic drugs have transformed health care for millions of individuals. Our physicians seek to use these advancements to treat their patients with the utmost care, providing high quality treatment and surgeries. The opportunity to perform a successful transplant often provides a new lease in a patient’s life. Without the complementary immunosuppressive medications following a kidney transplant, an individual’s body may reject the donor organ. The provisions of this legislation will extend Medicare coverage of immunosuppressive drugs and make them affordable so that kidney transplant recipients can avoid having to make the choice between high cost, essential medications and other necessities—a difficult decision our patients should not have to make, especially during a national pandemic. The AMA has long advocated for an elimination of the 36-month limit on immunosuppressive drug coverage under Medicare and is very supportive of the bill you have introduced in the Senate to end this policy. Other important aspects of the bill include:

- Elimination of the 36-month limitation on coverage of immunosuppressive medications for Medicare beneficiaries who are kidney transplant recipients, and exemption of those who enroll in Medicare Part B solely for the purpose of coverage of immunosuppressive drugs from the time limitation of coverage.
- Clarification that Medicare Part B immunosuppressive medication coverage only be available to those without other types of insurance coverage for these drugs, with a required attestation of no other coverage which would pay for these drugs.
- Recognition that individuals may need to enroll in Medicare Part B due to voluntary or involuntary termination of previous health coverage, and permission for re-enrollment following either of these events.
- No increase in premiums for individuals who are enrolled in Medicare Part B for immunosuppressive drugs only.

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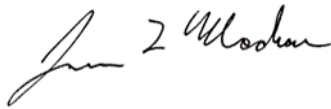
It is particularly important that this legislation go into effect as many individuals are facing challenges with health, employment, housing, and finances during this COVID-19 pandemic. Coverage of these immunosuppressive drugs need not be yet another complicating factor for those who have been able to receive a kidney transplant.

This bill also makes sound fiscal sense, as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) assessed the costs and benefits of extending immunosuppressive drug coverage for kidney transplant patients and reported a 10-year accumulated savings of \$73 million.¹ The evidence is clear that this is the right path for all to take, eliminating the restrictions that are both costly and detrimental to patient health.

The investment in a kidney transplant is best preserved with the coverage of the essential immunosuppressive drugs. Congress has an important role to play to eliminate the artificial barriers to coverage of immunosuppressive drugs which have plagued kidney transplant patients for far too long. For these reasons, the AMA thanks you for your leadership in ushering this important legislation and urges Congress to pass S. 3353.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jim L. Madara".

James L. Madara, MD

¹ Savings from Extending Coverage for Immunosuppressive Drugs Final is available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/assessing-costs-and-benefits-extending-coverage-immunosuppressive-drugs-under-medicare> (last accessed on October 15, 2020).