



October 30, 2011

Donald M. Berwick, M.D.
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
Attention: CMS-1503-P
Room 445-G, Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Administrator Berwick,

As a coalition of more than 125,000 individuals, either affected by obesity or healthcare professionals that treat those affected, the Obesity Care Continuum (OCC) urges the Medicare program to expand coverage for surgical treatment of obesity to include vertical sleeve gastrectomy. We applaud the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for opening up a National Coverage Determination (NCD) to address this specific treatment – especially given that many private health plans now routinely provide coverage for this procedure.

Data exist to demonstrate that weight loss and complications for the vertical sleeve gastrectomy are comparable and fall between two CMS-approved weight loss surgical procedures --Roux-en-Y gastric bypass and adjustable gastric banding. Furthermore, Medicare coverage of vertical sleeve gastrectomy will afford those Medicare patients affected by obesity an additional treatment option for addressing their weight and obesity-related comorbidities while maintaining gastrointestinal continuity. Finally, expanding Medicare coverage for this procedure will ensure consistent patient access to obesity treatment options across both the non-Medicare and Medicare patient population.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us through OCC Washington Coordinator Chris Gallagher at chris@potomaccurrents.com or via telephone at 571-235-6475.



Sincerely,

Robin Blackstone, MD, FACS

Robin Blackstone, MD, FASMBS, FACS
ASMBS President
Scottsdale, Arizona

Sylvia Escott-Stump

Sylvia Escott-Stump, MA, RD, LDN
ADA President, 2011-2012
Winterville, North Carolina

Patrick O'Neil

Patrick O'Neil
TOS, President, 2011-2012
Charleston, SC

Barbara Thompson

Barbara Thompson
OAC Chair of Board of Directors
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

With a combined membership of over 100,000 healthcare professionals and patient advocates, the Obesity Care Continuum is dedicated to promoting access to, and coverage of, the continuum of care surrounding the treatment of overweight and obesity. The OCC also challenges weight bias and stigma oriented policies – whenever and wherever they occur. The OCC is a coalition of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), the Obesity Society (TOS), the American Dietetic Association (ADA), and the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS).