



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
March 13, 1999

Ms. Nancy-Ann Min Deparle  
Administrator  
Health Care Financing Administration  
200 Independence Avenue S. W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201-0004

Dear Ms. Min Deparle,

I am concerned about the lack of Medicare coverage for Augmentative Communication Devices (AAC Devices), which provide individuals with severe expressive communication disabilities (i.e. unable to speak, use sign language, or write due to cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, stroke, ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, etc.) the ability to communicate, allowing them to lead more productive, safer and enjoyable lives.

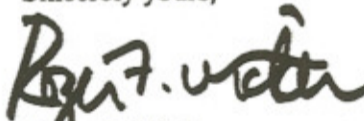
Over a decade ago, HCFA issued a National Coverage Determination that AAC Devices were not covered by Medicare since they were classified as "communicators" and were deemed to be a convenience which was not primarily medical in nature. This decision also placed AAC Devices in the Durable Medical Equipment category rather than the Prosthesis category. This conflicts with the FDA recognition of AAC Devices as a type of Prosthetic Device.

Since the non-coverage decision by HCFA, funding for AAC Devices has been granted by every state Medicaid program, by CHAMPUS and the Veterans Administration at the Federal level, and by hundreds of commercial health insurance providers. HCFA's non-coverage decision hurts Medicare recipients by deterring the filing of AAC Devices funding requests under Medicare, therefore denying access by individuals in need of such equipment.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please contact me if I can ever be of assistance.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

  
Roger F. Wicker

RFW/jp