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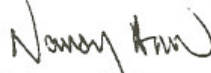
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April 21, 1999

The Honorable Nancy-Ann Min DeParle
Administrator
Health Care Financing Administration
314-G Hubert H. Humphrey Building
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Administrator DeParle,



I have been contacted by several of my constituents concerning Medicare coverage for Augmentative Communication Devices (AAC Devices). These devices are designed to give individuals the capacity to communicate with others. Individuals who need these devices are generally unable to speak, use sign language or communicate in writing due to severe disabilities.

In 1987, HCFA issued a National Coverage Determination (NCD) which classified AAC Devices as "communicators" and therefore not eligible for Medicare coverage. However, since this decision, 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. In addition, HCFA's classification of AAC Devices as Durable Medical Equipment is at variance with the Food and Drug Administration's classification of such devices as "prosthetics."

My constituents are concerned that previous requests for information regarding the reasoning behind HCFA's 1987 coverage determination have not been successful. They are also concerned about not being able to obtain information regarding the original AAC Device, which was evaluated in the decision process. I would encourage HCFA to consider revisiting this issue in the near future, in light of AAC Device coverage standards in other public and private insurance programs, as well as the apparent unavailability of records relating to the original non-coverage determination.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



SAM JOHNSON
Member of Congress