



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

December 9, 2011

The Honorable Dennis J. Kucinich
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative Kucinich:

Thank you for your letter regarding the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) draft recommendation on prostate cancer screening. I greatly appreciate your taking the time to share your concerns about the effect this recommendation, if finalized, could have on men who have suffered with prostate cancer and their families. I have shared your concerns directly with the Task Force leadership.

As you are aware, Congress authorized the Task Force as an independent panel of non-federal, volunteer experts in clinical prevention and evidence-based medicine, and the Task Force is composed of primary care providers such as internists, pediatricians, family physicians, gynecologists/obstetricians, nurses, and health behavior specialists. The Task Force conducts scientific evidence reviews of a broad range of clinical preventive health care services and develops recommendations to inform America's primary care professionals and the patients and families they serve. While HHS's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality provides research, administrative, and dissemination support for the Task Force, the judgments and decisions of the Task Force are independent from the federal government.

The Task Force recognizes the impact that each of its recommendations has on patients, primary care clinicians, clinical practice, and health coverage. As such, it follows a rigorous process for gathering and reviewing evidence, developing a recommendation, and engaging experts and stakeholders to review its work. The Task Force bases all of its recommendations on a systematic review of published medical evidence; cost is not a factor that it considers when making recommendations. Regarding the research the Task Force used in drawing its conclusions on prostate cancer screening, all of its recommendations, an evidence synthesis, a clinical summary, and other supporting documents—including the Task Force methods, processes, and procedures—are available online at the Task force website, www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. At this point, the Task Force has published its draft recommendation on prostate cancer screening for public comment and is inviting health care professionals, patients, families, advocates, and scientists to review the evidence and provide comment on whether the Task Force assessed the evidence accurately and fairly and whether its draft recommendation statement could be improved.

I recognize your concern that the Task Force's final recommendation on screening for prostate cancer could affect coverage of PSA tests under Medicare. While the Department has discretion to modify or eliminate coverage for the PSA test based on the Task Force's recommendation, I

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do not intend to eliminate coverage of this screening test under Medicare at this time. With respect to private plans, the Affordable Care Act permits plans or issuers to provide coverage for services in addition to those recommended by the Task Force, thereby allowing coverage for PSA screening to continue.

I believe the most important lesson from the work of this Task Force is that the men and families of our nation deserve better and more effective screening tests and treatments for prostate cancer. I am pleased that the National Cancer Institute is engaged in research that aims to improve prostate cancer screening and treatment methods. It is my hope that in the future the Task Force will find evidence supporting new tests and safer treatments.

Again, thank you for sharing your concerns about prostate cancer screenings. I appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to continuing our work to improve the health of all Americans. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further thoughts or concerns. I will also provide a copy of this letter to the cosigners of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen Sebelius". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K".

Kathleen Sebelius