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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Medicare Survey Polls Nearly 6,000 Pharmacists** *88% call for immediate improvements in Part D program*

**Richmond, VA**—In a comprehensive survey of nearly 6,000 pharmacists only 119 called the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program a success. Pharmacists from across the country expressed their views through a survey conducted by the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin on behalf of the National Council of State Pharmacy Association Executives (NCSPA).

The web-based survey captured the opinions of 5,859 pharmacists, inclusive of pharmacists from every state, during the final two weeks of March. The pharmacist respondents make up approximately 2.5 percent of all practicing pharmacists.

The survey found that there have been significant operational and financial problems for pharmacies serving Medicare Part D enrollees. Although the operational problems lessened in the months of February and March, 45 percent of the pharmacists said that their pharmacy was still spending more than 10 hours each week resolving Part D-related problems.

The financial problems created by Part D may be of even greater concern to pharmacists. Of those pharmacists who responded, 60 percent said that Part D would have a negative impact upon their business, including 12 percent who reported that it may force their pharmacy to close. Twenty-eight percent of pharmacists were unsure of the business implications of Part D and only 10 percent of pharmacists believed Part D would be good for their businesses.

“The results of this survey should cause every policy-maker in the country to take notice. Even when a Part D program works properly for a beneficiary, it is still likely to have a negative effect on that beneficiary’s pharmacy provider. Further, when the program doesn’t work properly, it is pharmacists who are there trying to fix it. Congress must change the Part D program now--before it destroys the very pharmacy infrastructure it relies upon,” said NCSPA President Jim Bracewell of South Carolina upon announcing the results of the survey.

The survey quantified many anecdotal reports associated with pharmacist difficulties with the new Medicare program. The survey also uncovered some startling statistics. For example, an astonishing 85 percent of responding pharmacists involved in contracting with Part D plans reported that the plans responsible for administering the benefit refused to negotiate terms with their pharmacy. Further exaggerating the impact of not being able to negotiate contract terms, 85 percent reported that the Part D pharmacy reimbursement terms they were offered were either below average or the lowest in the market.

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“We conducted this survey to identify and report what the Medicare Part D program was doing to and for the nation’s pharmacy providers. There is no group of individuals who want this program to work as it was envisioned and as it is needed more than the nation’s practicing pharmacists. Pharmacists are there, day-in and day-out, doing their very best to serve their patients, but their efforts are being compromised by the companies responsible for administering the program,” said Chris Decker, Executive Vice President and CEO of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin.

Not only did Congress expect that Medicare Part D plans would negotiate fair and reasonable terms with the pharmacies tasked with the responsibility for dispensing medications to Medicare recipients, Medicare officials repeatedly advised plans against creating barriers to medications during the first 90 days of the program. However, the responding pharmacists reported that prior authorization has been required for more than 20 percent of the prescriptions they dispense to individuals enrolled in Part D programs. “It’s not supposed to happen at all, yet it has happened all the time. Where is our system of checks and balances?” asked Bracewell. “It is time for Congress to see that those companies that have been given the keys to the program are driving it in the proper direction and that both Medicare recipients and pharmacy providers are fairly treated.”

### **Key Survey Findings**

- The number of Part D problems encountered by pharmacists has reduced but more than half of the problems continue to require greater than 20 minutes of the pharmacist’s time to resolve.
- More than 50 percent of responding pharmacists still have at least 5 Part D-related problems each day.
- Only 49 percent of responding pharmacists are confident that seniors are enrolled in programs that best suit their needs and over half of the pharmacists are confident that another program would work better.
- 68 percent of responding pharmacists said that at least 10 percent of their patients had restrictions placed upon receipt of their medications by Part D plan sponsors despite contrary direction from Medicare officials.
- Nearly half of the pharmacist respondents indicated that they had provided medications to Medicare recipients at no charge when Part D coverage could not be determined.
- 88 percent of pharmacists reported that they believed moderate to major improvements in the Part D program are required for it to be successful.
- Pharmacists reported that more than half of the Medicaid/Medicare dual eligible patients have less coverage and higher co-payments than they had previously under state Medicaid programs.
- 85 percent of responding pharmacists involved in Part D plan contracting reported that they were not able to negotiate contract terms at all but rather were provided take-it or leave-it contracts by Part D plans.
- 82 percent of responding pharmacists familiar with the payment cycles of Part D plans said that it took 4 or more weeks to receive payment for the medications they had dispensed.
- Only 10 percent of responding pharmacists said that Part D would have a positive impact upon their practice, while 60 percent reported Part D was having a negative impact upon their business or could force it to close.

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*The National Council of State Pharmacy Association Executives (NCSPA), representing the interest of state pharmacy associations since 1927.*

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