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COPD Foundation Assisting with Medicare Home-Oxygen User Complaints

MIAMI, FL — In order to address the complaints that have arisen as a result of changes in Medicare home oxygen equipment reimbursement, the COPD Foundation's resource hotline—the C.O.P.D. Information Line (1-866-316-2673)—will be receiving calls from those with COPD who have complaints about their home oxygen service.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2009, reimbursement for home oxygen changed, when the law establishing a 36-month rental cap on payment for oxygen equipment impacted the first round of Medicare beneficiaries. The law states that Medicare will be responsible for paying 80 percent of the equipment rental for the beneficiary for 36 months, beginning at the time when the Medicare beneficiary receives the new oxygen unit. After the 36 months, Medicare will cease to make payments, but the Durable Medical Equipment (DME) providers must continue to provide service, free of charge, to the beneficiary for the remaining life of the oxygen equipment, which is deemed to be five years after the oxygen equipment was first delivered to the patient.

The beneficiary is never responsible to continue making payments or co-payments after the first 36 months have passed. Once the life of the oxygen equipment is completed, DME providers must pick up the old equipment and supply the oxygen patient with a new one if it is determined that the beneficiary must continue to receive oxygen. If the unit is replaced, Medicare will begin a new 36-month rental schedule.

In addition to the 36-month rental cap, home oxygen reimbursement has been cut by 9.5% in a deal that the DME companies negotiated with Congress in order to delay the implementation of a Competitive Bidding Program. The 9.5% implemented Jan. 1, 2009 is intended to represent a portion of the savings that would have been realized had Medicare implemented the Competitive Bidding Program. Competitive Bidding is still planned - but has been delayed for 18 months until Medicare and the DME industry work out issues associated with the program, such as accreditation.

The COPD Foundation's goal is to assure that individual beneficiaries continue to have access to

the care they need. These reimbursement policy changes prompted some people to contact the COPD Foundation about their concerns with their DME supplier and home oxygen service. The COPD Foundation has established a relationship with the appropriate liaisons within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to register and respond to patients' concerns, and developed a consistent tool to collect patient complaint data that will allow CMS to take action with their DME contractors if it is warranted.

Reports from individuals who call the COPD Foundation through the C.O.P.D. Information Line to file a complaint will be sent directly to the appropriate individuals at CMS.

Please contact the C.O.P.D. Information Line at 1-866-316-2673 to report a complaint you may have regarding your oxygen service.

About Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is the 4th cause of death in the U.S. and will become the 3rd by 2020: it is the only chronic disease increasing in mortality. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute estimates that 24 million Americans have COPD, but only half of them are diagnosed; the other 12 million Americans don't know they have COPD and are not receiving appropriate treatment. This led to over \$42.6 billion in health care costs for American taxpayers in 2007.

About the COPD Foundation

The COPD Foundation is dedicated to developing and supporting programs which improve the quality of life through research, education, early diagnosis, and enhanced therapy for persons whose lives are impacted by Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

The COPD Foundation has several programs dedicated to informing, empowering, educating, and engaging individuals affected by COPD, including both diagnosed and undiagnosed individuals, their families and friends, and their medical professionals. The Mobile Spirometry Unit (MSU) has traveled across the nation, offering free lung tests and educational materials to over 17,000 individuals who were at risk or symptomatic for COPD. The Foundation distributes a quarterly magazine, *COPD Digest*, to over 200,000 individuals with COPD, family members, caregivers, medical professionals, and organizations in the COPD community. The Foundation also created a toll-free C.O.P.D. (Call Our Patients Direct) Information Line - staffed by volunteers with COPD - is open five days a week and offers support and educational materials to all callers. For more information, please visit: www.copdfoundation.org.

About the Alpha-1 Foundation

The mission of the Alpha-1 Foundation is to provide the leadership and resources that will result in increased research, improved health, worldwide detection, and a cure for Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency. For more information, please visit: www.alphaone.org.