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December 12, 2008

The Honorable Tom Daschle
c/o Presidential Transition Team
Washington, DC

Sent via email

Dear Mr. Daschle:

On behalf of the nation's 26,000 hospitalists—physicians whose primary professional focus is the general medical care of hospitalized patients—I want to congratulate you on your nomination to be Secretary of Health and Human Services and head of the new White House Office of Health Reform. The Society of Hospital Medicine looks forward to working with you to make health care reform a reality in 2009.

Hospital medicine is the fastest growing physician specialty in the United States. Studies show that hospitalists help reduce patient lengths of stay, treatment costs, improve clinical outcomes and positively impact the quality of medical care and patient satisfaction. Our organization is dedicated to promote high-quality care for all hospitalized patients and is eager to lend its expertise to your health reform efforts.

We have a unique opportunity to address improvements in health care quality as part of health care reform. In particular, SHM believes we need to refocus our system, and our dollars, to better coordinate patient care. We are leading a number of initiatives designed to improve care related to patient discharge and transitions, and encourage you to include policies that promote better care coordination, particularly the transition from hospital to home, as part of your health reform efforts. We believe that one of our projects, in particular, has enormous potential to reduce readmission rates and improve overall medical care.

SHM's Project BOOST (Better Outcomes for Older Adults through Safe Transitions) is designed to improve the care of patients as they transition from the hospital to home (see attached fact sheet). By improving discharge processes, Project BOOST aims to reduce 30-day readmission rates for general medicine patients, with particular focus on older adults. According to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), about 18 percent of Medicare hospital admissions result in readmissions within 30 days of discharge, accounting for \$15 billion in spending. BOOST employs strategies that have been shown to reduce avoidable readmissions, such as improving the flow of information between sending and receiving physicians, ensuring that high-risk patients receive follow-up calls within 72 hours of discharge,



and improving patient and family education practices to encourage use of the teach-back process around risk-specific issues.

Changes in reimbursement practices to reward safe, complete transfers of care and information should be considered as you move forward on health reform, and SHM would be happy to provide you with further input in this area.

In the meantime, please contact Laura Allendorf, SHM's Washington Representative (LAllendorf@hospitalmedicine.org or 703-242-6273), if we can provide you with more information on Project BOOST and its potential to reduce readmission rates.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Cawley, MD
President