



**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
OTOLARYNGOLOGY–
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY**

June 23, 2015

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman, Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the approximately 12,000 Members of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), I'm writing to express our strong opposition to certain provisions in the FY 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill as passed by the Subcommittee on June 17. **Specifically, the proposed bill eliminates funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), in addition to a number of other critical health services important to the ongoing patient-centered outcomes research effort.**

As a point of reference, the AAO-HNS is the national medical association of MD/DO physicians dedicated to the care of patients with disorders of the ears, nose, throat (ENT), and related structures of the head and neck. We are commonly referred to as ENT physicians, and provide treatment for some of the most common conditions that afflict all Americans, young and old. They include chronic ear infection, sinusitis, snoring and sleep apnea, hearing loss, allergies and hay fever, swallowing disorders, nosebleeds, hoarseness, dizziness, and head and neck cancer.

The AAO-HNS, our Members, as well as others in the health/medical community, continue to recognize the importance of delivering high-quality healthcare to the nation's patients. With a mission to generate the evidence necessary to build a high-quality, high-value health care system, AHRQ is a critical partner for our organization in achieving that goal. **Put simply, AHRQ-funded research is being used in hospitals, private practices, health departments, and communities across the nation to make our healthcare system less complex and costly.**

For example, all of our organization's developed clinical practice guidelines (CPG) are registered with the AHRQ-sponsored National Guidelines Clearinghouse (NGC). This clearinghouse is essential to dissemination of our CPGs to ensure they are viewed by all stakeholders. To date, our 13 published guidelines have nearly 500,000 views. All of the AAO-HNS-developed performance measures, via our Foundation, are registered with the AHRQ-sponsored National Quality Measures Clearinghouse (NQMC). In addition, the AAO-HNS currently has eight performance measures registered, and through the NQMC, we are able to post our measures, while simultaneously keeping abreast of what other measures are in development. This sharing of information helps us to ensure there is no duplication of efforts.

The NGC and NQMC are just two examples highlighting the importance and critical function of the AHRQ. At its core, AHRQ provides practitioners, healthcare providers, health plans, integrated delivery systems, purchasers, and others an accessible mechanism for obtaining

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detailed information regarding quality measures and/or clinical practice guidelines, and furthers their dissemination, implementation, and use in order to inform healthcare decisions.

AHRQ-driven research fuels innovation and improves quality, identifies waste, and enhances efficiency in the healthcare system, helping Americans get their money's worth when it comes to healthcare. We need more of this kind of research, not less. The United States spends \$3 trillion annually on healthcare – the largest share of which are federal purchases through Medicare, Medicaid, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan, insurance exchanges, TRICARE, and veterans' healthcare. While these are important benefits, physicians must also have access to reliable information on how to deliver the best possible care, at the greatest value, with the best outcomes. AHRQ-funded health services research provides those answers.

Although the AAO-HNS recognizes the current fiscal realities, we are disappointed that the proposed Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill defunds AHRQ despite its positive impact on the health-related research community. We are concerned that the AHRQ's unique skill set will be lost in the proposal to combine agency resources resulting in a regression of the progress in the "quality movement" so important in healthcare reform.

Delivering high-quality and efficient care is a priority for our Members and the patients they treat—and AHRQ has become a critical partner for our organization. As a result, we urge you to oppose the proposed language that terminates this agency and its important research. We look forward to working with you, and other members of the Appropriations Committee, on this important issue. If you or your staff have questions or would like additional information regarding the AAO-HNS and our work with AHRQ, please contact legfederal@entnet.org.

Sincerely,

James C. Denny III, MD
Executive Vice President and CEO

Cc: U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee