



Organizations representing the vast majority of cardiologists round the country have joined forces today to preserve and protect the highest quality cardiac care available in America. Guarding Hearts Alliance is advocating protecting patient access to cardiac care in whatever Medicare changes or health care reform legislation is enacted.

Guarding Hearts Alliance is a partnership representing more than 23,000 cardiologists who are vitally concerned about the access to quality care for more than 80 million patients suffering from heart disease. The group's mission is to educate lawmakers and others about how proposed Medicare regulations and health care reforms could needlessly risk patient lives.

America's cardiologists have made great advancements against heart disease, reducing heart-related deaths and the severity of heart-related illness by 27% during the past 10 years. The urgent need for this specialty will continue to grow by 60% in the next 15 years as baby boomers age.

## **INCIDENCE OF HEART DISEASE**

- Nearly 80 million Americans, or one in three adults, have heart disease. More than 38 million are 60 or older.
- Nearly 2,400 Americans die of cardiovascular disease each day—an average of one death every 37 seconds.
- Cardiovascular disease claims about as many lives each year as cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, accidents and diabetes mellitus combined.
- According to the National Center for Health Statistics, if all forms of major cardiovascular disease were eliminated, life expectancy would rise by almost seven years. If all forms of cancer were eliminated, the life expectancy gain would be three years.
- Advancements in cardiology during the past 10 years have reduced heart-related deaths and the severity of heart-related illness by 27 percent.
- From 1980–2002, death rates due to heart disease among those over 65 years of age decreased by 52 percent in men and 49 percent in women.
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## **FAST ACTION SAVES LIVES**

- Patients with cardiovascular disease cannot wait for diagnosis and treatment. In fact, cardiac death symptoms develop so quickly that almost 300,000 people annually experience cardiac arrest before they have a chance to get to a hospital.
- Patients awaiting cardiac catheterization may experience major adverse events, such as death, myocardial infarction (heart attack) and congestive heart failure, which in many cases may be preventable.
- A study of a public hospital in Galveston, Texas, showed that patients who had to wait longer than two weeks for their procedures were more than twice as likely to have an adverse event while waiting.

## **CARDIOLOGIST SHORTAGE**

- There currently is a substantial shortage of cardiologists, which will increase during the next 15 years to a total shortfall of about 16,000 specialists.
- The urgent need for cardiology as a specialty will increase 60 percent during the next 15 years as baby boomers advance in age.
- It takes up to 14 years of training to become a board-certified cardiologist.
- Of general cardiologists, 43 percent are currently over the age of 55 and projections assume that all of these physicians will retire during the next 20 years.

## **QUICK DIAGNOSIS WITH TARGETED TREATMENT**

- Cardiologists have a verified track record of utilizing appropriate treatment methods to improve survival rates and shorten the length of hospital stays. The value that a cardiologist brings to a patient's treatment, from diagnosis to discharge, is part of the quality access that must be protected.
- Having diagnostic tools accessible in the physician's office saves precious time and helps ensure accurate diagnoses, thus improving patient outcomes.
- Peer-reviewed data demonstrates that timely access to diagnostic imaging allows physicians to more accurately identify and treat diseases and care for their patients. Imaging reduces the need for invasive procedures and allows physicians to look inside the body to detect and treat many life-threatening conditions, including cardiovascular disease.