

February 5, 1997

The Honorable Greg Ganske, MD  
The Honorable Edward Markey  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Ganske and Markey:

On behalf of the nation's largest medical specialty, the American Society of Internal Medicine (ASIM) is pleased to endorse the "Patient Right to Know Act," which would prohibit "gag rules" imposed by some managed care organizations (MCOs). Gag rules are contractual provisions or other agreements between health plans and physicians that limit physicians' ability to communicate with their patients on medical matters.

Free and unrestricted communication between doctors and their patients is critical to good health care. Patients need to know that their physicians can at all times advise them on the best course of action to treat their illnesses, without having to worry about violating contractual agreements.

ASIM applauds those MCOs that have on their own eliminated gag rules. We also appreciate the recent decision of the trade association that represents most MCOs to call for voluntary elimination of gag rules by its member plans. Nevertheless, ASIM believes that federal legislation is required to assure that gag rules are eliminated by all plans in all areas of the country. Voluntary guidelines cannot by themselves assure that the principle of freedom of communication between doctors and patients is uniformly accepted and applied by all health plans.

ASIM commends your efforts to protect physician-patient communication and offers its assistance in promoting passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Alan Nelson, MD  
Executive Vice President