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July 13, 2007

Senator Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6200

Dear Senator Grassley:

The Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSAs) is pleased to endorse S.1507, the "Access to Medicare Data Act of 2007." As an organization that represents more than 8,000 infectious diseases physicians and scientists, we strive to strengthen infectious diseases research and ensure that patients suffering from serious infectious have access to effective anti-infective therapies.

The Access to Medicare Data Act of 2007 will provide federal health officials and other health researchers with controlled access to physician and prescription drug claims that are processed on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) data set promises to provide critical information on the treatment of infectious diseases, and it will serve as a tremendous source of useful information on trends in antimicrobial use and prescribing. Heretofore, data on actual trends in drug prescribing has been out of the reach of federal and public health experts outside of CMS. This new information will help spur innovations that will ensure the best quality in patient care as well as strengthen public health protections and patient safety.

The increasing emergence of multi-drug resistant forms of infectious pathogens including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), resistant strains of *E. coli* and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) is of grave and paramount concern to IDSAs leaders. Inappropriate prescribing by physicians is one cause of drug resistance. Yet, data on antimicrobial use has been a missing element in the ongoing efforts to better understand, treat and control drug resistance.

With this Act, many experts will have access for the first time to a large data set on antimicrobial use. Experts will be able to analyze this data together with clinical and epidemiological information, gleaned from the linked data sets that will be provided through this Act and through other sources, in order to develop a more rigorous understanding of how and why antimicrobial-resistant pathogens emerge in patients, hospitals and communities. Access to this data will lead to improvements in the understanding of the causes of resistance and

ideas for interventions to improve prescribing and control transmission of resistance.

IDSA strongly endorses the Act's provision to extend data access not only to federal health experts but also to university-based and other research organizations. The majority of IDSA's members engage in research activities which include the study of the clinical progression of infectious diseases and opportunities for improved treatment. The data set will strengthen those efforts. IDSA also notes that increased access to information about immunization among Medicare beneficiaries will lead to improved efforts to bolster adult immunization rates.

To ensure the Act's maximal impact, we suggest a slight modification. In the section regarding appropriate uses of the data by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), IDSA strongly encourages the expansion of language on promoting consumer education to include consumer and physician education. This modification would ensure that officials at CDC can use the data to improve existing educational efforts designed to educate physicians about appropriate prescribing of antibiotics.

The following general comments may be helpful as well:

- The language describing the drug and health care claims data should be broad enough to encompass release of data on all Medicare beneficiaries. We observe that some Medicare beneficiaries obtain prescriptions from sources other than the prescription drug plan.
- There may be several useful paradigms for the process that will be used to facilitate data release. The process presently used by CMS may or may not serve as the optimal or most efficient framework for this activity.

Once again, IDSA applauds you for introducing the Access to Medicare Data Act of 2007. The Act will equip researchers and public health experts with an important tool they can use to improve the effectiveness and safety of drugs, protect the public's health, and strengthen the public's trust in the provision of health care. The Act also will lead to strengthened efforts to understand and control infectious diseases, including the spread of drug-resistant pathogens. Importantly, there are many examples in which large data sets are utilized while adequately safeguarding individual privacy, and this Act appears to offer sufficient privacy safeguards.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Robert J. Guidos, JD, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, at 703-299-0202, or RGuidos@idsociety.org.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Blaser, MD
Immediate Past President