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The Patients Equal Access Coalition Applauds a New Bill to Improve Access to Oral Cancer Drugs

Washington, DC, June 11, 2015—Today the Patients Equal Access Coalition (PEAC) commends Congressmen Leonard Lance (R-NJ-7th District) and Brian Higgins (D-NY-26th District) and Senators Kirk (R-IL) and Franken (D-MN) on the introduction of the Cancer Drug Coverage Parity Act of 2015, H.R. 2739/S. 1566. This bill is a critical step toward improving access to anticancer treatments by requiring insurance companies to cover patient-administered and physician-administered anticancer drugs at the same cost to patients.

As the science surrounding cancer treatment continues to improve, the number of chemotherapy drugs that can be self-administered by patients continues to grow. In some cases, they may be the only drug proven to treat a specific type of cancer.

To date, insurance coverage policies for these drugs have not kept up with scientific advancement. Patients who rely on self-injectables or chemotherapy pills find themselves spending as much as \$50,000 a year out of pocket because they receive the drugs from a pharmacy rather than in a doctor's office.

"For patients living with cancer across the country, this bill will mean one less thing to worry about. They will no longer have to decide between the best treatment and financial stability, and can focus on what really matters: beating their cancer," said Meghan Buzby, Senior Director of U.S. Advocacy for the International Myeloma Foundation (IMF). The IMF leads the coalition of organizations representing patients, health care professionals, care centers, and industry.

The legislation will benefit thousands of cancer patients across the country, including Patrick Dee of Knoxville, Tenn., a patient and advocate with the National Brain Tumor Society, who said, "Oral chemotherapy patients like me need this legislation. I don't have a choice. I must have access to oral chemotherapy in order to battle a brain tumor. Being able to take oral chemotherapy right at home also helps me take fewer sick days from work."

"As providers, we are often forced to choose between the best treatment for patients, and what they can afford. This bill would eliminate the cost difference between self-administered and physician- or clinic-administered cancer drugs, and allow physicians to prescribe the most appropriate chemotherapy for the patient," said Scott Soefje, a hematology/oncology pharmacist and president of the Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association.

The heavy financial burden often also forces patients to skip doses to save money, which impacts the drugs' effectiveness and puts the patients' lives at greater risk. "Part of our job is to make sure that

patients are taking their medications as prescribed. However, due to the costs of some oral and self-injectable chemotherapy, our patients cannot always comply. This bill would make these medications more accessible and improve the efficacy of the treatment,” Soefje said.

The Cancer Drug Coverage Parity Act will dramatically improve the lives of cancer patients. Patients who previously could not afford these treatments will be able to access their life-saving effects. It will also make cancer treatments more practical for patients living in rural and underserved areas by reducing the need to drive long distances for a nurse or doctor to administer treatment.

“Restricting access to medication that is the best and, often, only viable treatment option for cancer patients is a practice that makes sense neither medically nor financially,” said Dr. Candace Johnson, President and CEO of Roswell Park Cancer Institute. “Many of the emerging and most effective cancer therapies are available only in an oral form; our payment systems need to keep pace with innovation.”

To date, 39 states and the District of Columbia have passed similar laws to increase access to these life-saving drugs. To expand this to all cancer patients in the country, we need a federal law that sets a standard across all states so that all cancer patients can access both physician and patient administered chemotherapy.

PEAC thanks Congressmen Lance and Higgins and Senators Kirk and Franken for their leadership and urges Congress to pass the Cancer Drug Coverage Parity Act.

About PEAC

The Patients Equal Access Coalition (PEAC) is a patient-focused coalition of 26 organizations representing patients, health care professionals, care centers, and industry, which have joined together to ensure that cancer patients have equality of access (and equality of insurance coverage) to all approved anticancer regimens including, but not limited to oral and intravenous drugs, injection, surgery, radiation, and transplantation. PEAC believes that every cancer patient should have access to the anticancer regimens recommended by their physicians and should not suffer from cost discrimination based on the type of therapy provided or the mechanism of delivery. For more information and a list of members, please visit our webpage: <http://peac.myeloma.org>.

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