

## Summary of the ATPP Town Hall Meeting | January 15, 2025

This town hall meeting focused on strategizing a grassroots response to Medicare reimbursement cuts that threaten physicians' ability to provide care. Participants expressed frustration with the failure of traditional lobbying efforts and emphasized the need for direct action to influence Congress and raise national awareness.

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### Key Themes and Proposed Actions:

#### 1. Work Stoppage Concerns & Alternative Protests

- Legal Risks: Participants debated the feasibility of a national work stoppage and the legal consequences of such an action.
- Legal counsel warned that a work stoppage could be viewed as collective bargaining and lead to penalties under federal law.
- Instead, alternative forms of protest were considered:
  - A "Day of Mourning for Medicare," where doctors symbolically pause non-urgent services.
  - A national walkout or protest to generate media attention and patient advocacy.

#### 2. Unionization & Physician Advocacy

- Participants compared physicians' advocacy efforts to unions like the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), discussing whether doctors should unionize to negotiate fair rates.
- Coalitions & Collective Bargaining: The group examined legal pathways for forming a physician coalition while avoiding antitrust violations.
- The American Medical Association (AMA) and specialty societies were criticized for being ineffective in preventing Medicare cuts, leading to calls for a new physician-led advocacy movement.

#### 3. Public Awareness & Media Strategy

- A media push was identified as essential to making this a national issue. Ideas included:
  - Social media campaigns, billboard ads, and a Wall Street Journal advertisement (\$164K).
  - Leveraging high-profile figures like Mark Cuban to amplify the message.
  - Using real patient stories to demonstrate the human impact of Medicare cuts.
  - Developing short, engaging videos explaining the issue in a simple and emotional way to reach both patients and policymakers.

#### 4. Physician Burnout & Workforce Shortages

- Participants stressed the need to highlight the impact on physician burnout and staffing shortages.

- Declining reimbursement rates are leading to:
  - Doctors closing practices, especially in rural areas.
  - Increased ER visits due to lack of primary care access.
  - Reduced medical school interest in primary care specialties due to unsustainable salaries.

## **5. Political Lobbying & Grassroots Efforts**

- The group discussed targeting specific politicians and forming a lobbying strategy.
- Educating patients was seen as crucial to putting pressure on lawmakers.
- Suggestions included:
  - A Facebook group (“Physicians for Medicare Reform”) to coordinate efforts.
  - Encouraging patients to call their representatives through in-office QR codes linking to pre-written advocacy letters.
  - Partnering with AARP (although concerns were raised about AARP’s ties to UnitedHealthcare).

## **6. Countering Negative Public Perception**

- There were concerns that the media would portray physicians as greedy, dismissing their advocacy as self-serving.
- Key counterpoints included:
  - Medicare reimbursement needs inflation-based adjustments to keep practices open and ensure patient access.
  - Without proper funding, Medicare patients will experience longer wait times, fewer available physicians, and increased emergency room visits.
  - This is a patient access issue, not just a financial issue for doctors.

## **7. Marketing & Fundraising Strategies**

- Participants proposed funding efforts through:
  - GoFundMe or private donations to support outreach and advertising.
  - Hiring a professional marketing firm to execute a national campaign.
  - Developing a coordinated social media strategy to reach millions of patients and doctors.

## **8. Social Media & Celebrity Endorsements**

- The group discussed hiring influencers or celebrities to bring attention to the issue.
- Proposed actions:
  - Creating a dedicated Instagram and X (Twitter) account for patients to share their Medicare stories.
  - Organizing a viral campaign featuring physicians walking out of clinics as a form of symbolic protest.
  - Developing a social media strategy to educate and mobilize patients and physicians nationwide.

## 9. Action Plan & Next Steps

- Participants emphasized gaining public traction before organizing a large-scale protest.
  - Volunteers stepped forward to lead efforts in social media, marketing, and grassroots organizing.
  - A formal structure was proposed for the Alliance to Protect Patients (ATPP):
    - Creating committees for social media, political outreach, and finance.
    - Establishing a website, Facebook group, and email list for coordination.
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## Conclusion

The meeting concluded with appreciation for participants' engagement and a commitment to taking the next steps in public outreach, physician mobilization, and legislative advocacy. The Alliance to Protect Patients aims to scale up its movement, recruit more physicians and patients, and launch a coordinated action plan to force Medicare reform before more practices close and access to care worsens.