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October 16, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the American Thoracic Society (ATS), thank you for your leadership in initiating reform of our nation's healthcare system. The ATS looks forward to working with you and the Congress to finalize health reform legislation that will expand access to quality, affordable healthcare, including appropriate preventative care and chronic disease management, for all Americans.

The ATS is a 16,000 member scientific medical organization dedicated to the prevention, detection, treatment and cure of respiratory disease, critical care illness and sleep related disorders through research, clinical care and advocacy. Pulmonary disease, critical illness, and sleep disorders each represent leading causes of death and disability in the U.S. and, unfortunately, the effects of each of these diseases are increasing. Therefore, the ATS is deeply committed to healthcare reform that will enhance the ability of our members to serve our patients and their families and to improve the health of the public.

We urge you to support House and Senate health reform measures aimed at expanding preventative care, chronic disease management and strengthening of the public health system. Better system-wide prevention and management of chronic diseases, like COPD, asthma, sleep-disordered breathing and other chronic respiratory conditions will improve public health and reduce health system costs.

We are hopeful that House and Senate prevention initiatives, including the elimination of cost-sharing for preventive services recommended by the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF), Medicare coverage of annual Wellness and Health Risk Assessments (HRA), and Healthy Lifestyle and Right Choices initiatives, will help reduce the incidence of chronic diseases associated with tobacco use. We are pleased that the legislation will authorize Medicaid coverage of tobacco cessation programs for pregnant women and support for other populations through the Medicare and Medicaid Wellness and Healthy Lifestyles initiatives. ATS members treat individuals with tobacco addiction and the diseases that it causes such as COPD and we know that expanding access to evidence-based tobacco cessation programs will save thousands of lives.

61 Broadway, 4th/28th Floors
New York, NY 10006 - 2755
P. (212) 315 - 8600
F. (212) 315 - 6498
www.thoracic.org

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The ATS also strongly supports the House and Senate measures that focus on strengthening of the nation's public health system. A strong public health system is essential to protecting Americans from infectious respiratory illnesses and diseases like influenza and tuberculosis. We believe that the creation of the Prevention and Public Health Investment Fund and appropriate funding of this Fund will provide a sustainable reinvestment into programs that improve public health.

We thank you for your support of prevention, chronic disease management and public health measures and urge you to ensure their inclusion in final health reform legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Randall Curtis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "C".

J. Randall Curtis, MD, MPH
President
American Thoracic Society