



American Academy of Sleep Medicine

American Sleep Patients Rely on U.S. Legislature to Form a Congressional Healthy Sleep Caucus

As a member of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and as a constituent, I call upon the members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to protect the health and wellbeing of Americans nationwide by forming a Congressional Healthy Sleep Caucus.

The AASM is the leading professional society representing a combined membership of 11,000 accredited member sleep centers and sleep medicine physicians, scientists and health care professionals. I, along with my fellow physician members, personally see the disastrous ramifications of untreated sleep diseases every day-- in our practices, in the workplace, and on American roads and highways.

The number of Americans suffering from an untreated sleep disease is staggering; choosing to ignore the risks of unhealthy sleep is no longer a viable option. The effects of untreated sleep diseases and poor sleep hygiene extend far beyond standard Monday morning drowsiness. 70 million Americans suffer from sleep problems; among them, nearly 60 percent have a chronic disorder such as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), insomnia, narcolepsy, and restless legs syndrome (RLS).

Unhealthy sleep severely increases the risk of developing or worsening potentially lethal comorbid diseases such as heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and depression. In addition, the lack of healthy, restorative sleep claims the lives of many others as sleep deprived driving is the cause of 21% of all fatal car crashes. As unhealthy sleep clearly is linked to many of the most prominent threats to American lives the legislative response to bringing untreated Americans to sleep care must begin to match the urgency in which lawmakers combat other high-profile, potentially life-threatening medical problems.

Adding to the far-reaching consequences of unhealthy sleep, sleep diseases significantly hinder a broad and diverse spectrum of American lives. Although sleep disorders can affect both men and women and all citizens in every age demographic, the populations at the highest risk of having or developing a sleep disease include:

- Those with existing comorbidities (type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, depression);
- Senior Citizens;
- Males;
- African Americans;
- AND
- Overweight or obese citizens.

Subsequently, the economic burden caused by untreated sleep diseases is no longer sustainable for the American economy. Accounting for work productivity, quality of life, stress on interpersonal relationships, etc. the total annual cost of unhealthy sleep reaches \$149.6 billion-- \$6,366 per untreated individual. In comparison, the average annual cost for bringing each untreated patient to quality, physician care amounts to less than one-third of that cost-- \$2,105 per person.

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The AASM is trying to combat untreated sleep diseases and poor sleep hygiene through various initiatives. One of our endeavors is to support telemedicine legislation that will increase a patient's access to care. The AASM supports a number of these bills currently under consideration that will expand the use of telemedicine in order to bring medical care to underserved populations. The AASM also supports initiatives that establish coordinated care for our Medicare patients. Recently, the Senate Committee on Finance issued a white paper and conducted a hearing on the Stark Law, which prohibits a physician from referring Medicare patients for "designated health services" (DHS) to an entity with which the physician (or an immediate family member) has a financial relationship. The AASM is working with Congressional members on establishing an exception to the Stark Law in order to allow a sleep physician to perform and interpret a sleep test, provide a diagnosis, and distribute the appropriate durable medical equipment (DME) to Medicare patients for use in the treatment of their obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).

The stakes are too high and Congress must take action to combat the debilitating effects of unhealthy sleep. American sleep patients rely on you to be one of the founding members of a Congressional Healthy Sleep Caucus in united, bipartisan support of commonsense sleep medicine legislation.

The AASM has been privileged to work with many esteemed members of the U.S. legislature in the past, and I look forward to working with you in our future endeavors. For further information or a discussion on Congress' role in promoting American sleep health, please contact Ted Thurn, AASM Senior Health Policy and Government Affairs Analyst at tthurn@aasmnet.org or (630) 737-9700 to discuss any potential collaborative opportunities.

I thank you again for your steadfast work to empower physician voices on Capitol Hill.

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Watson, MD, MS, FAASM
President

cc: Ronald Chervin, MD, FAASM, President-Elect
Jerome A. Barrett, Executive Director

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