



Diagnostic Imaging Online
September 20, 2007

Report from AdMeTech: Legislators pledge funding for prostate cancer imaging research

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Two members of Congress have announced they will support House legislation that will earmark more than \$600 million for prostate cancer imaging research and education.

Representatives Elijah Cummings and Albert Wynn, both Democrats from Maryland, will cosponsor the House version of the Prostate Research Imaging and Men's Education Act introduced in June by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) as S 1734 and cosponsored by Sens. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and John Kerry (D-MA). Reps. Cummings and Dan Burton (R-IN) had previously championed HR 353, which calls for increased federal research funding for prostate imaging. The House bill has 50 bipartisan cosponsors.

Cummings and Wynn made the announcement at a press conference on Capitol Hill.

The House bill would authorize \$650 million in appropriations during five years to the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund R&D of imaging technologies for more accurate diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer. The bill also authorizes \$10 million for an educational campaign to raise awareness about the life-saving role of prostate cancer screening,

One of six men in the U.S. -- one every 2.5 minutes -- will be diagnosed with prostate cancer. One of them will die approximately every 20 minutes. Positive outcomes depend on catching disease early, but current tests to diagnose prostate cancer are unreliable. Stigma and confusion surrounding the disease and the detection tests, Wynn said. Radical costs to healthcare are another consideration.

Too few men are being diagnosed correctly, and most get diagnosed too late, particularly African Americans and Latinos. Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among African Americans, who also have the highest death rate from prostate cancer of any racial or ethnic group. A more accurate diagnostic technology would not only save lives but also drive medical costs down.

The proposed bill would ensure the type of technology necessary to accomplish that goal, Wynn said.

"We must demand, and we now have the ability to have an increased federal role in, prostate imaging comparable to what we did successfully in the 1990s to stimulate breast cancer imaging technologies," he said.

A strategic partnership comprising Congressional leadership, public and private investment, and advocacy support was responsible for the success of breast cancer imaging initiatives. The same model has been replicated to advance R&D programs in prostate cancer imaging technologies, said Dr. Faina Shtern, president of the AdMeTech Foundation, which hosted the event.

Advocacy support and education of Congressional leaders are critical components of this model, Shtern said.

"They set off a virtuous cycle," she said.