

## **Media Alert from the Neuropathy Action Foundation (NAF)**

**For immediate release:** February 22, 2007

**What:** Arizona State Senate Health Committee Hearing on IVIG Access and Reimbursement Crisis

**When:** Thursday, March 1, 9 a.m.

**Where:** Arizona State Senate, 1700 West Washington, Phoenix, AZ 85007, Room 109

### **Patients and Physicians Expected to Ask for Assistance from State Senate Health Committee at Hearing on Consequences of IVIG Access Crisis**

PHOENIX [February 22, 2007]—Seven people in the United States are reported by patient advocates to have died due to lack of access to the human plasma product, intravenous immune globulin (IVIG). Meanwhile, thousands of Arizona Medicare beneficiaries and privately-insured patients continue to depend on the availability of IVIG to prevent the life-threatening infections and paralysis associated with their chronic diseases, but many are beginning to see their access to the product reduced or denied.

The Arizona State Senate Health Committee will conduct a hearing at the state capitol on March 1 to learn more about this healthcare crisis. Senator Carolyn Allen, health committee chair, said, "We hope this hearing will inform Arizona decision-makers about the 'crisis in care' threatening Arizona patients – and that this heightened awareness will result in a rapid Congressional solution in the near future."

Twice, the U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability has recognized the crisis and recommended to HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt he declare a public health emergency that would enable an alternative reimbursement schedule for IVIG products. The Secretary has not followed the recommendation, and the problem is now extending to patients with private insurance.

"Private insurers follow Medicare's lead on reimbursement rates, so the IVIG access crisis has spread beyond Medicare recipients," explained Dominick Spatafora, founder and president of the Neuropathy Action Foundation and a patient on IVIG therapy. "The crisis now affects the countless thousands of people across the United States, including Arizona, who rely on this human plasma product to remain active, contributing members of their communities. Our state representatives must urge Congress to take action – before we lose more patients."

IVIG is used to treat primary immune deficiency and autoimmune diseases, among others. The biopharmaceutical product prevents life-threatening infections and paralysis. Access to IVIG has been limited in many cases by inadequate insurance reimbursement, denials of coverage based on non-standard treatment and on dosing guidelines adopted by some local Medicare carriers.

Those testifying at the hearing include Arizona patients experiencing IVIG access problems, an Arizona physician who treats patients with IVIG, and the nation's largest IVIG distributor.

Patients treated with IVIG and those who provide their care are encouraged to attend the hearing.

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