The following summary is adapted from the American College of Radiology regarding the status of Medicare Reimbursement for Screening CTC:

**Medicare Coverage for Computed Tomography Colonography (CTC)**

**Background**

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer and one of the leading causes of cancer death in the United States. Medicare covers beneficiaries for several colorectal cancer screening procedures, including optical colonoscopy. Although CT colonography (CTC) – known as virtual colonoscopy - is endorsed by the American Cancer Society as a recommended screening test, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association Technology Evaluation Center named it an effective screening tool, and major insurers – including CIGNA, UnitedHealthcare, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield - cover virtual colonoscopy as a screening option, Medicare does not cover screening virtual colonoscopy.

Peer-reviewed studies, including results of a landmark trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, have proven the virtual exam comparably effective to standard colonoscopy. Virtual colonoscopy is also comparable to optical colonoscopy in cost. Availability of virtual colonoscopy has also been shown to increase colorectal cancer screening rates. This is vital. Screening rates for colorectal cancer are just below 60% in most parts of the country putting CRC behind both breast and cervical cancer in terms of screening test compliance rates.

Colorectal cancer is almost always curable when caught early enough through colorectal cancer screening, and adding Medicare coverage of virtual colonoscopy could prevent unnecessary deaths. This is particularly true among minorities where screening rates are traditionally lower. Many Americans, particularly in the Hispanic and African American communities, are reluctant to undergo traditional colonoscopies due to various perceptions – including cultural stigmas and the invasiveness of standard colonoscopy.

In 2009 the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, released a study demonstrating that the disparity between white and nonwhite Medicare enrollees receiving colonoscopy screening actually increased between 1995 and 2003. National Medicare coverage of screening virtual colonoscopy would potentially close the gap in colorectal cancer screening between whites and minorities by providing an option more acceptable to those who should be screened for CRC, but choose not to be screened.

**Issue**

In February 2012, the American College of Radiology Imaging Network (ACRIN) published a study addressing one of the main issues cited by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in 2009 when they deferred acceptance of CTC as a covered screening test. In the new study, researchers compared the sensitivity and specificity of CTC in subjects 65 years old and younger with results in those older than 65. The analysis did not reveal any statistically significant differences in the diagnostic accuracy of CTC for detecting large and intermediate-size adenomatous lesions in participants 65 years of age and older, compared with younger participants. These findings are consistent with 3 other recently published large trials evaluating CTC performance in older (e.g. Medicare-age) patients.

This evidence led the American Cancer Society to release a joint guideline with the American College of Radiology and the United States Multi-Society Task Force on colorectal cancer entitled, “Screening and Surveillance for Early Detection of Colorectal Cancer and Adenomatous Polyps”. These new guidelines emphasized that the primary goal of colorectal screening is cancer prevention and that there was compelling evidence to support CTC.

There are 19 states that require insurance providers to cover the full range of tests identified by the American Cancer Society (ACS), which includes CTC. If Congress decides not to cover CTC, patients who have been screened using CTC prior to entering the Medicare program would be left with either a less sensitive or more invasive option. The 20 states plus DC that mandate full range of screening are: AK, AR, CT, GA, IL, IN, KY, LA, MD, ME, MO, NC, NJ, NV, OR, PA, RI, TN, VA, and WI.

In addition to those states that cover CTC, the Department of Defense has large volume screening programs using CTC at Walter Reed National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda. Walter Reed has determined their program to be a success and is working with the Department of Veterans Administration to deploy CTC screening throughout the VA Health System. Medicare patients deserve the same access to this valuable colorectal cancer screening option.