

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 6, 2014

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to follow up on our interest in improving the treatment for allergic rhinitis (AR) and asthma. In a letter dated June 27, 2011, you indicated that following the release of a report of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Department would be able to proceed with development of a comprehensive, multi-agency research program on this topic. That report was released in late March and concluded that immunotherapy (IT) is effective in reducing asthma and allergic rhinitis symptoms and medication use as well as improving quality of life for patients.

The AHRQ report also provided an agenda for future research including studies to:

- compare the efficacy of single vs. multiple allergen therapy and regimens for desensitization;
- develop methods of identifying asthma patients likely benefit from immunotherapy; and
- determine the efficacy and safety of allergen immunotherapy in specific subpopulations.

An additional area not covered by the AHRQ study is the question of why IT for the treatment of allergic rhinitis is underutilized in the United States. Studies have shown that in the U.S., less than 10% of AR patients receive immunotherapy. As a result, patients are not experiencing the clinical benefits documented in the AHRQ report and elsewhere. In addition, in light of studies showing that use of IT can reduce the cost of treating patients with AR by almost 50%, studies of how to improve patient utilization of IT could result in significant health care cost savings.

It is important for agencies within your Department to proceed with the development of a comprehensive research initiative on the use of IT for the treatment of AR and asthma, including an effort to develop strategies to promote utilization in appropriate patients and encourage provider and patient education and compliance with existing guidelines.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and request a status update from you as to how the Department plans to proceed.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



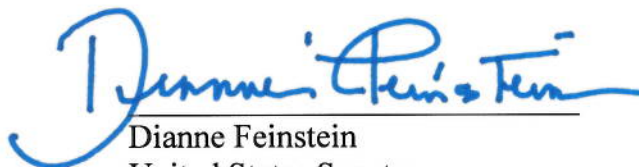
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Dianne Feinstein
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