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United States Senate

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November 17, 2014

Dr. Francis S. Collins
Director, National Institutes of Health
Building 1, Room 126
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dr. Richard Kronick
Director, Agency for Health Care
Research and Quality
540 Gaither Road, Room 2113
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Drs. Collins and Kronick:

I am writing to inquire about the agenda for the upcoming expert workshop regarding the AHRQ's comparative effectiveness review of allergic rhinitis and asthma treatments. As you may know, in 2011 and again in 2014, a group of Senators joined me in writing to Secretary Sebelius regarding our interest in improving treatment for allergic rhinitis and asthma. Specifically, we expressed our concern that allergen-specific immunotherapy (AIT) may be underutilized in the United States for the treatment of allergic rhinitis.

Although AHRQ's March 2013 comparative effectiveness review on AIT found immunotherapy to be safe and effective for the treatment of allergic rhinitis and asthma, studies have shown that less than 10% of AR patients in the United States receive AIT. As a result, many patients are not experiencing the clinical benefits documented in the AHRQ report and elsewhere. In addition, studies suggest that increased utilization of AIT could reduce the cost of treating patients with allergic rhinitis by almost 50%. AIT has also been associated with asthma prevention.

It is my understanding that the aspects of the upcoming expert workshop on immunotherapy will focus on comparative effectiveness topics as well as basic and clinical research that is needed on new approaches to immunotherapy, such as sublingual administration. These are important issues; however, as stated in the two previous letters to Secretary Sebelius, a research agenda is also needed on the causes of AIT underutilization, potential barriers to access, approaches to improving provider and patient compliance with clinical guidelines for the treatment of allergic rhinitis, and the role of AIT in asthma prevention. It is my hope that these research topics will also be included on the agenda for the workshop.

I appreciate your attention to this important issue and request that you provide a brief report regarding the agenda for the NIH/AHRQ workshop and your plans for addressing the issues highlighted above. If you have any questions or require clarification, please feel free to contact Beth Vrabel at (202) 224-4524 or by email at beth_vrabel@cardin.senate.gov.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator