

# American Medical Association

Physicians dedicated to the health of America



March 9, 2004

The Honorable William H. Frist, MD  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Dr. Frist:

**In conjunction with this week's observance of National Patient Safety Awareness Week, the American Medical Association (AMA) strongly urges the Senate to pass S. 720, the "Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Act of 2003,"** as favorably reported by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on July 23, 2003. By passing S. 720 now, this critically important legislation can move to conference and be reconciled with H.R. 663, a patient safety bill which passed in the House of Representatives during last year's National Patient Safety Awareness Week.

The AMA agrees with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and leading patient safety experts that our health care system needs to transform the existing culture of blame and punishment that suppresses information about errors into a "culture of safety" that focuses on openness and information sharing to improve health care and prevent adverse outcomes. This transformation requires the initiative by Congress to pass legislation that will encourage reporting of health care errors without the fear of punishment. S. 720 would amend the Public Health Service Act to provide the core elements necessary to establish a system by which health care errors can be confidentially reported and analyzed to improve patient safety and health care quality. State reporting requirements would not be preempted. This legislation strikes the proper balance between maintaining confidentiality and legal protections for information defined as "patient safety data" and the need to ensure accountability throughout the health care delivery system, a balance envisioned by the IOM.

Improving patient safety and health care quality is a long-standing and ongoing high priority for the AMA. We are committed to working with Congress and our partners in patient safety initiatives to achieve a meaningful long-term approach to improve patient safety in the delivery of quality health care in our nation. **We strongly urge the Senate to pass S. 720 as a fundamental significant step toward reducing errors and improving safety and quality.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael D. Maves".

Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA