

## **Eliminate the Medicare Waiting Period for Disabled Individuals**

The North American Brain Tumor Coalition and brain tumor advocates nationwide urge their Senators and Representatives to join as cosponsors of the Ending the Medicare Disability Waiting Period Act of 2009 (S. 700/H.R. 1708). The legislation would end the two-year Medicare waiting period for disabled individuals with life-threatening illnesses and phase it out over a period of ten years for all others. This is an urgently needed reform to Medicare rules that currently prevent seriously disabled individuals from receiving Medicare benefits at the very time when they need desperately need health care.

Over 1.2 million Americans who are receiving Social Security Disability payments are caught in a two-year period before they will receive Medicare benefits. Of this total, 400,000 have no access to health insurance of any kind. In its report on this issue, *Too Sick to Work, Too Soon for Medicare: The Human Cost of the Two-Year Medicare Waiting Period for Americans with Disabilities*, The Commonwealth Fund found that nearly 39% of the individuals stuck in the waiting period do not have health insurance coverage at some point during this period, and 26% have no health insurance during the entire period. At a time when these disabled individuals are in great need of quality health care, they have no means to finance it and may be forced into bankruptcy to obtain appropriate care.

Counted among the seriously disabled who are “waiting” for health care are many brain tumor patients. For these patients, a delay in receiving care can be catastrophic. Brain tumor care often cannot be delayed for days and it certainly cannot be postponed for months or years.

The waiting period for Medicare benefits was implemented when the Medicare program was expanded in 1972 to include the disabled. The policy denies disabled individuals access to health care and can no longer be justified on cost-saving grounds or for any other reason.

The North American Brain Tumor Coalition requests that:

- Representatives cosponsor H.R. 1708.
- Senators cosponsor S. 700.
- All Members of Congress support the inclusion of the provisions of H.R. 1708/S. 700 as elements of health care reform. This reform of Medicare is an essential first step in expanding access to quality health care.