DRAFT ISASS Member Comment letter

Submission Link: <https://www.regulations.gov/commenton/CMS-2025-0028-0013>

Dear Dr. Oz,

As a practicing spine surgeon and member of ISASS, I respectfully urge CMS to reassign spinal fusion procedures involving sacroiliac joint (SIJ) fusion and pelvic fixation components to higher-severity MS-DRGs in the FY 2026 IPPS rulemaking.

Procedures involving SIJ fusion and pelvic fixation adjunctive to spinal fusion are not equivalent to standard spinal fusion cases. Incorporating pelvic fixation and SIJ fusion into a spinal construct represents a substantial increase in surgical complexity. These cases often address multi-segment instability, deformity, or other advanced spinal pathology that requires extension of the fusion into the pelvis for durable stability. The operative demands, intraoperative risk, instrumentation costs and clinical decision-making associated with these cases differ meaningfully from more routine spinal fusion procedures.

Despite this, current MS-DRG groupings place these cases into the same categories as cases with far less surgical intensity. This misclassification underrepresents the clinical reality and resource utilization of these procedures and fails to align with the goal of accurate, cost-based hospital reimbursement.

CMS has previously acted to revise DRG assignments when clinical differences and instrumentation costs warranted a distinction, as was the case with custom-made anatomically designed interbody fusion devices in FY 2025. The same principle applies here. Reassignment of these cases would not represent new policy, but rather the logical extension of CMS’s ongoing efforts to ensure MS-DRG assignments reflect the complexity and resource needs of advanced surgical care.

I strongly encourage CMS to apply the same standard to cases where pelvic fixation and SIJ fusion are performed adjunctive to spinal fusions. Appropriate MS-DRG assignment supports accurate reimbursement and preserves access to care for Medicare beneficiaries with complex clinical needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and your thoughtful consideration of this request.

Sincerely

[insert name, degrees, titles and signatures here]