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Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Part B Payment: US Congress Decides to Boost Conversion Factor Through February 29

At nearly the last minute, lawmakers ensure that you won't lose 27 percent.

Although the government appeared poised to take a big bite out of your next Part B payments, you have another two months before you need to worry about losing pay. That's because the 27 percent Medicare pay cuts that practices have feared since last fall were once again kicked to the curb by Congress, resulting in a Medicare Physician Fee Schedule conversion factor of $34.0376 through Feb. 29.

On Dec. 23, the House followed the Senate's lead in voting to halt the Medicare pay cut for two months, which will freeze Medicare pay at 2011 rates through the end of February.

Problems aren't over: Although Medicare pay is now set to drop on March 1, the AMA is hopeful that Congress will find a longer-term solution before then. "With this brief reprieve from the massive 27 percent cut to Medicare payments, Congress now has to enact a real and fiscally responsible solution to this sorry cycle of scheduled cuts and short-term patches that compromises access to care for patients and drives up costs for taxpayers," AMA president Peter W. Carmel, MD, said in a statement. "Members of Congress need to use this time to work in a bipartisan manner to provide long-term stability for seniors, military families and the physicians who care for them."

RVU cuts took effect: Keep in mind that the Congressional vote only adjusted the conversion factor for 2012 (which had been set to drop by 27 percent on Jan. 1). Other changes slated for Jan. 1 -- for instance, RVU adjustments printed in the 2012 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Final Rule -- did take effect, as did the multiple procedure payment cuts for diagnostic imaging.