

Optometry Coding & Billing Alert

ICD-10: ICD-10 Date Will Be Postponed, HHS Confirms

Delay could offer practices additional time to prepare for new diagnosis coding system.

Just three months ago, CMS representatives firmly told medical practices that the ICD-10 implementation date would not be pushed back beyond Oct. 1, 2013 -- but what a difference a few months makes.

The Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced on Feb. 16 that the ICD-10 implementation date will indeed be postponed. The agency stated that it "will initiate a process to postpone the date by which certain health care entities have to comply with International Classification of Diseases, 10th Edition diagnosis and procedure codes (ICD-10)."

"ICD-10 codes are important to many positive improvements in our health care system," said HHS Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** in a statement. "We have heard from many in the provider community who have concerns about the administrative burdens they face in the years ahead," Sebelius said. "We are committing to work with the provider community to reexamine the pace at which HHS and the nation implement these important improvements to our health care system."

The announcement followed hints that CMS was planning a pushback. On Feb. 14, acting CMS administrator **Marilynn Tavenner** said she intends to "re-examine the pace at which we implement ICD-10," which would require the agency to go through the standard federal rulemaking process. Tavenner made her comments to great applause at the American Medical Association's National Advocacy Conference, attendees said.

Physicians Are Cautiously Optimistic About Timeline

Keep in mind that neither the HHS nor CMS has announced just how much of a delay will take place, but physicians are pleased that they'll benefit from some additional time to implement the new diagnosis coding system.

"The American Medical Association appreciates Secretary Sebelius' swift response to address the AMA's serious concerns with ICD-10 implementation," said AMA President **Peter W. Carmel, MD**, in a Feb. 16 statement. "The timing of the ICD-10 transition could not be worse for physicians as they are spending significant financial and administrative resources implementing electronic health records in their practices and trying to comply with multiple quality and health information technology programs that include penalties for noncompliance. We look forward to having a productive dialogue with the administration regarding the impact of ICD-10 and decreasing unnecessary hassles for physicians so they can take care of their patients."

Sebelius's statement appears to fall short of the AMA House of Delegates's original recommendation last fall, which was for a full repeal of ICD-10. However, a slower pace could at least buy time for practices that have not yet considered the impact of ICD-10 on their systems.

Stay on track: Despite the announcement of a slower timeline, you should continue to work toward compliance with the new diagnosis coding system, which appears to still be in place for future implementation.

To read Sebelius's statement, visit www.hhs.gov/news/press/2012pres/02/20120216a.html.