

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

BILLING: Stop Rushing to Switch Over to the New CMS-1500

CMS gives you a breather due to incorrect forms

Don't discard your old CMS-1500 forms just yet.

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** granted you a respite and will allow the old version (12-90) until around June 1, not April 1 as originally planned. Next month, Medicare contractors were supposed to accept only the new version (08-05), which accommodates the National Provider Identification (NPI) number.

The delay will give everyone, including providers, clearinghouses and vendors, more time to comply with the new form, cheers **Cyndee Weston**, executive director of the **American Medical Billing Association**. -I am doubtful that some software vendors would have been ready by April 1,- she adds. Many of them will welcome the delay.

Also, some carriers might not have been ready to accept the new form, notes **Gary Lindsay** with **Lindsay Technical Consultants** in Mankato, MN.

The problem: Print vendors, specifically the **Government Printing Office** (GPO), are selling incorrectly formatted versions of the revised form, notes **Brian Reitz**, CMS health insurance specialist, in a March 9 Medicare notice.

Submitting incorrect versions of the revised form will delay your payments. Your carrier won't key in a claim using an incorrectly formatted version and will instead return it to you.

To find out if your CMS-1500 version 08-05 is in danger of bouncing back, look at the upper-right corner of the form. Properly formatted claim forms contain approximately a one-quarter inch gap between the tip of the red arrow above the vertically stacked word -CARRIER- and the top edge of the paper. -If the tip of the red arrow is touching or close to touching the top edge of the paper, then the form is not printed to specifications,- Reitz concludes.

Even with the delay, the new form will have problems, Lindsay notes. There's no space to list the secondary carrier, which all primary carriers require. Physical therapists must list the date of the patient's last X-ray, but there's no space for it. And finally, the carrier's name and address are in the top right-hand corner, which means you can't use a windowed envelope--because the stamp should go in the upper-right corner.

Unresolved issue: -We don't exactly know how the claim form delay will play out with the NPI deadline in May,- notes Weston. -It shouldn't be an issue for electronic transactions. But with paper claims, use of old forms without the NPI after the NPI deadline could become an issue.-