

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Chill out with ICD-9s

The biggest change stemming from this new memo seems to be that CMS is leaning on physicians to supply actual ICD9 Codes instead of narrative diagnoses to labs as in the past, says consultant **Quin Buechner** with **ProActive Consultants** in Cumberland, Wis.

The old approach made it easier for physicians to give diagnoses such as "suspected scarlet fever," and then the lab could code whatever diagnosis it came up with based on the lab results, Buechner says. Now labs will be held to a higher standard of accuracy, and that in turn will put pressure on physicians.

Buechner says he always asks his clients: "Who is it you really want to assign the diagnosis to your patient? A lab tech receptionist?" Or would you rather have one of your own certified coders do it, "so you can rely on it?"