

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Diagnosis Coding: Transition to ICD-10 Code Set Could Be Just 3 Years Away

The transition won't happen overnight -- but will require some time to learn the ropes

You've got just over a month left before you need to update your diagnosis codes -- and you've only got three years left until the ICD-9 series is replaced by the new, overhauled ICD-10 codes, according to a recent HHS announcement.

Although the countdown to Oct. 1 -- the date you'll need to institute the new ICD-9 codes -- is fast approaching, the **Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS)** delivered a whammy earlier this week with its announcement that ICD-10 codes aren't too far behind.

On Aug. 15, HHS announced its proposal to replace the ICD-9 codes with the ICD-10 series effective Oct. 1, 2011. Not only would the new code set completely overhaul your claims systems, software and superbills -- but it could require vast training for your staff.

Here's why: The ICD-9 code series includes 17,000 codes. The ICD-10 code set, however, contains over 155,000 codes that you'll have to wrap your brain around if it's implemented as HHS hopes it will be.

"We recognize that the transition to ICD-10 will require some upfront costs, but each year of delay would create additional costs, both because of the limitations of ICD-9 and because of the need to employ the greater precision that ICD-10 codes provide to support value-based purchasing of health care and other initiatives," said CMS Acting Administrator **Kerry Weems** in a statement.

Many medical practices were surprised by the news of the impending ICD-10 implementation, despite the fact that CMS has been building the new code set for years.

"We've been thinking of ICD-10 as this far-away prospect that may never take hold," says **Heather Corcoran** with **CGH Billing**. "The new announcement sort of brings us back to the reality that this will indeed take effect."

The HHS is currently seeking comments on the proposed ICD-10 code set and transaction standards by Oct. 21. To read more, you can visit the CMS Web site at

http://www.cms.hhs.gov/TransactionCodeSetsStands/02_TransactionsandCodeSetsRegulations.asp#TopOfPage.