

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Drug Coverage: Medicare Will Start Drug Coverage Within A Year

The final edition of Medicare's rule for the 2005 prescription drug benefit went on display in the Federal Register Jan. 21., stating Medicare drug coverage is less than a year away.

The rule includes a process for plan sponsors to negotiate with the **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services** on their program bids. It also provides a streamlined appeals process for beneficiaries who need to get drugs that aren't on their plan's formulary and "any willing pharmacy" standards for long-term care pharmacies.

The rule spells out that beneficiaries with both Medicare and Medicaid will automatically gain membership in a drug plan by September or early October. The law allows for "facilitated enrollment" of low-income beneficiaries. CMS will start "intensive outreach" to find these beneficiaries and, where possible, fill out enrollment applications for them. The rule also includes:

1. no premiums or deductibles for beneficiaries who meet CMS' criteria for 'limited means';
2. a choice of at least two drug plans and improved access to pharmacies; and
3. guaranteed drug plan access for residents in long-term care facilities.