

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

INDUSTRY NOTES: Doctors Need To Ballast Hot-Air Cost Balloon

It's partly doctors' fault that medical costs are shooting up, says one influential doctor.

Mahendr Kochar, president of the 1,800-member **Milwaukee County Medical Society**, urged physicians to bring costs down in a speech, reports the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Doctors "must make every effort to keep the costs of health care down to the extent possible without compromising" quality of care, Kochar insisted.

That means standing up to patients who demand unnecessary tests or brand-name drugs when generic medications would do the trick, he said.

"We must explain to them why it is not in their best interest," Kochar wrote in an article for the Society's March newsletter called "Healthcare Costs - Up, Up and Away?" Kochar also appointed an eight-member task force to examine how the Society can slow cost increases.

1. **More HIPAA resources are becoming available** as the April 14 deadline for compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act privacy regulation nears. The transcript of CMS' Feb. 28 HIPAA Roundtable is now available at www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/hipaa2/events/default.asp#roundtable, and another call is planned for April 30.

And in a notice published in the March 20 Federal Register, the **HHS Office for Civil Rights** explains that people who think a health care provider has run afoul of HIPAA privacy rules need to submit their gripes, in writing, to the OCR regional office in their area.

2. **A new bill would cover medical nutrition services** for Medicare patients with cardiovascular disease. SB 632, introduced by Sen. **Larry Craig** (R-IL), covers nutrition for patients who haven't received diabetes outpatient self-management training services recently, aren't receiving maintenance dialysis, and meet other criteria set by the HHS Secretary.

Medical nutrition would have to be coordinated, and couldn't exceed three hours per year unless a physician determined more nutrition therapy was necessary.

3. **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services unveiled** a redesigned Web page for physicians. Called "Physicians Information Resource for Medicare," the site went live on Friday, March 21 and can be viewed at www.cms.hhs.gov/physicians/. The site includes a Physician Listserv and the **Medicare Physician Fee Schedule** Look-up.

The site also includes a new Q&A about physician fee schedules and CMS' plans to reduce physician payments for 2004, the last-minute second chance for physicians to change their Medicare participating status, and other issues.