

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Lab Signatures: Good News: CMS Retracts Lab Signature Requirement

Physician signatures on every lab requisition were perceived as cumbersome, unnecessary.

Clinical laboratories can finally exhale. On June 30, CMS published a proposal to retract its policy requiring a physician or NPP signature on every lab requisition, which had been set to go into effect earlier this year but was delayed several times due to massive opposition throughout the industry.

CMS had initially announced that the lab signature requirement would go into effect on Jan. 1, but later delayed it until April 1. However, on March 31, CMS announced that it would further delay the requirement and "focus for the remainder of 2011 on changing the regulation that requires signatures on laboratory requisitions because of concerns that physicians, NPPs, and clinical diagnostic laboratories are having difficulty complying with this policy." That gave labs hope that the requirement would be killed for good sometime this year.

In black and white: The new announcement notes that CMS will "reinstate the prior policy that the signature of a physician or qualified non-physician practitioner is not required on a requisition for Medicare purposes for a clinical diagnostic laboratory test paid under the Clinical Laboratory Fee Schedule."

Laboratories and the physicians who use them applauded the announcement. "The American Clinical Laboratory Association sincerely appreciates CMS rectifying this unworkable situation, ensuring that there will be no disruption in the provision of vital clinical laboratory service to Medicare beneficiaries," said its president, **Alan Mertz** in a June 30 statement.

Keep in mind: The announcement rescinding the signature requirement is still technically a proposed rule. CMS is accepting comments on it through August 29, after which it will hopefully finalize the regulation that squashes the requirement for good. You can submit comments online by visiting www.regulations.gov and referring to code CMS-1436-P.