

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

LEGISLATION: Your Doctor's Back Taxes Could Come Out Of Your Hide

Tell your senator how you feel about the Levin-Coleman bill

How much do you know about your doctor's personal finances? Chances are not much, but they could have a huge impact on your practice's future if one bill passes.

Watch out: Two influential senators have proposed a law that would hold back some of your doctor's Medicare payments if the doctor owes back taxes to the government.

The proposed legislation comes after the **Government Accountability Office** testified at a March hearing that more than 21,000 physicians and related providers owed \$1.3 billion in federal taxes. If just a portion of Part B payments had gone through a federal program to recoup tax debts, the government would have collected between \$50 million and \$140 million in unpaid taxes in just the first nine months of 2005.

The bill, introduced by Sens. **Carl Levin** (D-MI) and **Norm Coleman** (R-MN), would levy payments to -delinquent taxpayers- at 15 percent (or more) per year until they paid off their debts. CMS would start out by screening 50 percent of Part B payments within one year, and all payments the following year.

Most physicians are honest, but -others have been stuffing taxpayer dollars in their pockets at the same time they have been stiffing Uncle Sam by not paying their taxes,- said Levin. Medicare physicians also owe \$33 million in child support and \$27 million in student loans, so the bill would dock the physicians for those debts too.

It would be a -horrible injustice- to take money away from a physician practice just because of a doctor's personal financial situation, says **Rhonda Petrucillo**, director of revenues and reimbursement with **Metro Health Medical Center** in Cleveland -There would be no way, as an employer, that we would know that kind of information about the physician.-

-It's not just his personal paycheck,- agrees **Marcy Sabin**, radiology billing manager with **Texas Hematology/Oncology**. -You're taking that money away from the employees. People could lose their jobs.-

What to do: Write to your senator to express your opinion of the Levin-Coleman bill, which is heading to the **Senate Finance Committee**.