

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### MEDICARE: OIG Gives Coding Company a Seminar in Pain

Have you been duped by coding and billing education companies that tout nonexistent formal affiliations with Medicare? If so, you're not alone - and the **HHS Office of Inspector General** is fighting mad about it.

Indeed, the watchdog agency on April 3 socked La Mesa, Calif.-based **U.S. Seminar Corp.** with a demand letter seeking more than \$1 million in fines for misusing the word "Medi-care" on its marketing materials. The OIG maintains that U.S. Seminar sent out thousands of solicitations suggesting that Medicare or the **Department of Health and Human Services** formally approved, endorsed or authorized its coding and reimbursement seminars. The company also allowed its employees to misidentify themselves as Medicare representatives and told providers that its services were mandatory under the Medicare program.

Those solicitations generated complaints in every state in the nation, the OIG says, and continued despite repeated warnings that they were illegal. In fact, federal law provides for steep penalties for misrepresenting affiliations with Medicare and/or HHS in advertisements.

To see the OIG's April 8 Alert on the subject, go to <http://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/docs/alertsandbulletins/040803MisuseofHHSsymbols.pdf>.