

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### **PART B MYTH BUSTER: Patient May Be New To You--But Not Necessarily New In Medicare's Eyes**

#### **Check your billing records for tax IDs, past visits**

**Myth:** If your doctor hasn't seen a patient in your office in the past three years, you can always bill a new patient visit.

**Reality:** Not necessarily. Even if your doctor saw the patient in another location within the past three years, it may not be a new visit. Further, if another doctor with the same specialty in your group saw the patient within three years, you can't bill for a new patient visit.

**Example #1:** A group of oncologists has a hospitalist physician who shares a tax ID number with them, says **Nancy Giacomozzi**, office manager with **P.K. Administrative Services** in Lakewood, CO. If the hospitalist sees the patient first and then the patient visits the oncologists in their office, then it may not count as a new patient visit, she cautions.

**Caution:** Check your billing records carefully to make sure no other doctors with the same specialty and tax ID number have seen the patient within three years before billing a new visit, Giacomozzi recommends.

**New resource:** Luckily the **American Medical Association** has included a handy flow chart of new-versus-established along with CPT 2007. It clarifies that only face-to-face services count in determining new or established status, so if your doctor interpreted test results for a patient in the past, you can still claim that patient as a new patient. Also, the location in which a doctor saw the patient doesn't matter.

**Example #2:** A group practice maintains two offices on separate sides of town. A patient sees general surgeon -A- for a complaint of bowel pain at location -Y.- Six months later, the same patient sees general surgeon -B,- in the same group practice, for a new complaint at location -Z.- This would still count as an established patient visit.

**Consults:** Also, some specialists seem to believe that whenever they see an established patient with a new problem, they should at least be able to bill a consult. But such a visit only counts as a consult if the problem is really new and if another physician actually requested the specialist's opinion, warns **Deborah Churchill** with **Churchill Consulting** in Killingworth, CT.