

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Part B Payment: Congress Passes 1-Year Medicare Pay Fix

New legislation ensures that you'll avoid the scheduled 25 percent drop in Medicare pay next year.

You won't face the same nail-biting payment woes in 2011 as you did this year, thanks to a Senate Finance Committee bill that will freeze Medicare pay at current levels for another 12 months.

The House of Representatives passed the Medicare and Medicaid Extenders Act of 2010 on Dec. 9 and the Senate voted on it the day before, moving it to **President Obama's** desk for signature as Part B Insider went to press. The bill will eliminate the 25 percent cut that medical practices were going to face effective January 1.

Physicians cheered the news that they won't have to wait for the new Congress and Senate members to take their seats before determining whether a payment fix would take place. "The AMA welcomes bipartisan House passage of legislation to stop the Medicare physician payment cut for one year," said AMA president **Cecil B. Wilson, MD**, in a statement on Dec. 9. "Stopping the steep 25 percent Medicare cut for one year was vital to preserve seniors' access to physician care in 2011. Many physicians made clear that this year's roller coaster ride, caused by five delays of this year's cut, forced them to make difficult practice changes like limiting the number of Medicare patients they could treat."

The bill was passed as a bipartisan effort, and the Senate Finance Committee noted that it will cost \$14.9 billion over ten years to implement the physician pay fix. It will be funded by making minor adjustments to the Affordable Care Act, the health care legislation that President Obama signed into law last March.

The bill also extends the exceptions process for Medicare therapy caps and extends payment for the technical component of specific pathology services through Dec. 31, 2011, as well as including other provisions.

The full text of the legislation can be found on the Senate Finance Committee's Web page at <http://finance.senate.gov/legislation/>.