

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Part B Payment: Congress Votes to Boost Conversion Factor Through Dec. 31

At nearly the last minute, lawmakers ensure that you won't lose 23 percent

Although the government appeared poised to take a big bite out of your next Part B payments, you have another month before you need to worry about losing pay. That's because the 23 percent Medicare pay cuts that practices have feared since January were once again kicked to the curb by Congress.

On Nov. 18, the Senate voted to halt the Medicare pay cut for one month, and the House returned from Thanksgiving break on Nov. 29, at which point they also voted to freeze Medicare pay through the end of 2010. **President Obama** signed the legislation on Nov. 30.

Problems aren't over: Keep in mind that Medicare pay is set to drop even further effective Jan. 1, 2011, and the current legislation does not change that. The American Medical Association had urged Congress to not only curb the 2010 cuts, but to extend the conversion factor freeze through 2011, but that did not materialize. The AMA continued to hold out hope, however, that Congress would work on a pay fix for 2011 in the interim.

"Today, Congress staved off a Medicare meltdown for seniors, but this short-term reprieve ends when a 25 percent Medicare cut to physicians begins January 1," AMA President **Cecil Wilson, MD** said in a Nov. 29 statement. "While this short-term delay helps ensure that physicians can continue to care for seniors for the next month, congressional action early in December to stop the cut for one year will inject stability into the Medicare program and ensure that Medicare delivers on its promise of health coverage for America's seniors." Senate Finance Committee chair **Max Baucus** (D-Mont.) and ranking member **Charles Grassley** (R-Iowa) have vowed to pursue a full-year fix to the Medicare payment formula that they could enact before the 25 percent cuts kick in on Jan. 1, according to a Nov. 29 statement on the Senate Finance Committee's Web site.