

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Physician Note: CMS to Cover Obesity Screening and Counseling

Plus: You're still looking at a 27 percent potential Medicare pay cut on Jan. 1.

This holiday season, CMS has given several gifts that should keep on giving to your practice long into 2012 and beyond. Not only does Medicare plan to start covering annual cardiovascular disease prevention, depression screenings, and alcohol misuse screenings (see the Insider, Vol. 12, No 41), but the agency also recently announced that it will cover obesity screening and counseling as well.

On Nov. 30, CMS said that Medicare "is adding coverage for preventive services to reduce obesity" in an effort to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years.

"Obesity is a challenge faced by Americans of all ages, and prevention is crucial for the management and elimination of obesity in our country," CMS's **Donald M. Berwick** said in a statement.

Under the new decision, primary care providers who screen patients positive for obesity with a BMI of 30 kg/m² or greater will be eligible for a face-to-face counseling visit each week for a month, followed by face-to-face counseling visits every other week for another five months. If the patient loses at least 6.6 pounds over the first six months, the patient can continue to see the physician for additional obesity counseling once a month for another six months, totaling 12 months of counseling.

To read CMS's coverage decision, visit

www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/nca-decision-memo.aspx?&NcaName=Intensive%20Behavioral%20Therapy%20for%20Obesity&bc=ACAAAAAIAAA&NCAId=253&