

## **Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert**

### **Physician Note: HHS Settles With Dialysis Center Over Failure to Offer Sign Language Interpreter**

**Plus: Practitioners collected \$3.1 billion in EHR incentives, HHS says.**

If you can't communicate with your patient, you're unable to give him the best care possible. That's the verdict from a recent government settlement with a Maryland-based dialysis center.

The HHS Department announced on Feb. 17 that it entered into a settlement with the dialysis center following an investigation involving a deaf patient who was refused access to a sign language interpreter for his treatment. The dialysis facility attempted to communicate with the patient via writing notes, but because the patient was also vision impaired, the notes were not adequate, his family alleged.

Under the agreement, the facility must "ensure individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing have equal access to programs and activities as required," the HHS news release states. The facility must draft policies to ensure effective communication with patients, must train staff members on their non-discrimination obligations, and "provide patients notice of their right to appropriate auxiliary aids and services free of charge," the release states.

Background: State and federal laws require health care practitioners to provide accommodations to allow patients to effectively understand information about their medical treatment and decision options.

Reference: To read more about the HHS decision, visit [www.hhs.gov/news/press/2012pres/02/20120217c.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2012pres/02/20120217c.html).