

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

PHYSICIAN NOTES: Gear Up To Provide Quality Measurements To Government

President plans technology standards for health care providers

Your quality and outcomes could be held up for scrutiny sooner than you realize.

President Bush will sign an executive order requiring all health care providers who treat Medicare or Medicaid patients to have tools to measure their quality -in a matter of weeks,- HHS Secretary **Mike Leavitt** told the **National Governors Association** according to the Washington Post. The order also will call for uniform standards for your health information technology (HIT).

By the end of the year, most of the 100 largest employers will sign similar contracts with the hospitals and doctors who treat their workers.

At first, quality measurements and standards for HIT will be -pretty basic,- Leavitt noted. But they'll build the foundation for a system where patients can make informed decisions about which providers to visit, and how much treatments are likely to cost.

Governors expressed interest but were skeptical about whether doctors want their quality to be measured. But Leavitt said the physicians he's met with are eager to have standards set for care, so they can compare their performance with other physicians-. Doctors are also eager to receive financial rewards for high quality, Leavitt insisted.

In other news:

- About 35 -underperforming- organ transplant centers are receiving letters from the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** telling them to improve their quality--or risk losing their Medicare enrollment, says the Los Angeles Times. The Times recently reported that one in five transplant centers doesn't meet the minimum patient survival rate to keep serving Medicare patients.

- -America's emergency departments are underfunded, understaffed, overcrowded and overwhelmed--and we find ourselves on the brink of collapse,- **Frederick Blum**, president of the **American College of Emergency Physicians**, told a July 27 hearing of the **House Ways & Means Health Subcommittee**. The federal government should put more resources into Emergency Departments, or they won't be there for patients who need them, Blum warned.

- The **AQA Alliance** and the **Hospital Quality Alliance** have joined forces to promote quality measurement, transparency and improvement in health care. The two will work closely with CMS and the **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality** to expand several ongoing pilot projects to measure and report on performance in a meaningful way, they announced.

- CMS has joined forces with kidney organizations and providers to form the **Kidney Community Emergency Response Coalition** and to develop a plan for making sure the health care needs of people with kidney disease are met after a natural disaster.