

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### PHYSICIAN NOTES: HHS Could Be Giving Health IT Grants Soon

#### But House kills health IT bill

The Senate passed a bill that would encourage you to use information technology to help prevent medical errors and reduce costs, according to press reports.

S.1418 would create the **Office of the National Coordinator of IT** within the **Department of Health and Human Services**. HHS would give grants to group physician practices and other providers to spur the use of health IT systems. The bill also would clarify that current medical privacy rules would apply to health information stored or sent electronically.

But separately, the House rejected a bill to give HHS \$61.7 million for health IT in fiscal year 2006.

#### In other news:

- HHS entered into agreements with organizations that will help to promote electronic records in the Gulf Coast region, where many paper records were destroyed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.
- The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** has only adopted two out of the 27 practices it needs to be able to invest in information technology properly, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO-06-12). CMS spent \$2.55 billion on internal IT systems in 2005, but didn't have enough controls to ensure the money was invested wisely, the GAO complains.
- Around 67 percent of Americans are concerned about the privacy of their health information and many are unaware of their privacy rights, according to the **California HealthCare Foundation's** National Consumer Health Privacy Survey 2005. Some 66 percent of patients believe that paper files are more secure, while 58 percent believe electronic records are more secure.
- CMS adopted a final rule on electronic claims under HIPAA that was almost exactly the same as the interim final rule it issued in August 2003. The only change was that CMS renamed "unusual circumstances" to "unusual cases."
- The **American Association of Retired Persons** once again asked Congress to make sure that any pay increase for physicians next year doesn't lead to higher premiums for Medicare beneficiaries. "Congress must ensure that health care does not become increasingly unaffordable for Medicare beneficiaries," the AARP told Congress in a memo.
- CMS revised the carrier implementation dates for the Competitive Acquisition Program for Part B drugs to reflect the fact that the program will launch in July 2006, not January, in Transmittal 761 dated Nov. 22.
- Medicare will limit payments for therapy services starting in January, according to Nov. 18 Transmittal 759. The limits will be \$1,740 for occupational therapy and \$1,740 for speech language pathology and physical therapy services combined.