

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Physician Notes: Medicare Reform Legislation Looks Less Likely This Year

Thirteen GOP representatives who voted "reluctantly" for the House Medicare bill vowed on Sept. 17 to oppose any conference report that lacks provisions that they view as essential to control costs and promote competition.

In Sept. 16 remarks to reporters, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) voiced growing skepticism that negotiators could bridge the deep differences now. He suggested that a broad revamping of Medicare could wait until next year, and in the meantime Congress could take modest steps with bipartisan support, such as a prescription-drug card.

Shifts in physician reimbursement that took place in 2002 suggest increased demand for some specialty care and shrinking demand for primary care. That's according to the American Medical Group Association's 2002 compensation and productivity survey. Only certain high-demand specialties saw significant compensation increases in 2002, according to AMGA.

Between 2001 and 2002, radiology topped the winners' list of specialties with a 12.64 percent increase in compensation. Close behind were otolaryngology, with an 11.54 percent increase, and gastroenterology, with a 10.07 percent increase.

Orthopedic surgeons also saw a significant, though smaller, boost, posting a 7.82 percent median compensation increase between 2001 and 2002. Close behind were medical oncologists with a 7.14 percent increase, and cardiologists, with a 7.08 percent increase.

But median compensation declined for some specialties, several in the primary-care area. Pediatrics and adolescent care was especially hard hit, posting a 3.79 percent decline from 2001 to 2002. Also showing a decline was pathology, where compensation dropped by 3.24 percent. Ophthalmology compensation declined by 2.31 percent, internal medicine by 1.81 percent, emergency care by 1.42 percent, and pulmonary-disease care by 1.24 percent.

A June 17 indictment against Alvarado Hospital Medical Center accuses the hospital and owner Tenet Healthcare Corp. of paying more than \$10 million to fund over 100 physician relocation agreements, designed to recruit physicians to areas where there's a doctor shortage. The feds allege these payments went instead to already established physicians as payments for referrals to Alvarado. Tenet insists its relocation policies are "entirely appropriate under the law."

Physician Anant Mauskar and his office manager Nadine Norman were caught up in the vortex of a Department of Justice crackdown on fraudulent power-wheelchair claims. A grand jury returned a 101-count indictment against Mauskar and Norman. A nine-count criminal filing also targets physician Lewis Gottlieb, accused of selling signed certificates of medical necessity to durable medical equipment suppliers for \$200 each.