Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Physician Notes: Ready Your Practice for Next Year's SSN-Free Medicare Card Transition

Medicare cards are getting a makeover in 2018. With a start date sometime in April of 2018, beneficiaries will no longer be identified by their Social Security Numbers on their Medicare cards. The time to prepare your staff and patients for that change is now.

"The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is readying a fraud prevention initiative that removes Social Security numbers from Medicare cards to help combat identity theft, and safeguard taxpayer dollars," CMS says in a release.

"The new cards will use a unique, randomly assigned number called a Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI), to replace the Social Security Based Health Insurance Claim Number (HICN) currently used on the Medicare card." Beneficiaries' new, unique MBI numbers will contain a combination of numbers and uppercase letters.

Deadline: "CMS will begin mailing new cards in April 2018 and will meet the congressional deadline for replacing all Medicare cards by April 2019," the agency says.

To help your patients get ready for the transition, you can double-check that their address in the system is accurate. "Your patients will not get a new card if their address is not correct," CMS advises.

"If the address you have on file is different than the Medicare address you get in electronic eligibility transaction responses, ask your patients to correct their address in Medicare's records through Social Security."

Your billing department also needs to make sure it's up for the new 11 digit alpha numeric MBI, CMS instructs. Ask any vendors you use about their MBI readiness to make sure they'll be prepared for the change. "Make and internally test changes to your practice management systems and business processes by April 2018, before we mail the new Medicare cards," CMS says.

More information about the new cards under the Social Security Number Removal Initiative (SSNRI) is at www.cms.gov/Medicare/SSNRI.