

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

PHYSICIAN NOTES: Sickest Medicare Patients Still Go To Physicians With Poor Technology

And most doctors only use technology for one out of five functions

Most Medicare patient visits in 2001 went to physicians with a low level of technology in their offices.

Some 57 percent of Medicare patient visits were to physicians who used information technology for only one out of five major functions, such as exchanging clinical data with other physicians or accessing patient notes, according to a new report from the **Center for Studying Health System Change**. Access to physicians with sophisticated IT systems was roughly the same for sicker and healthier patients, the CSHSC report (Data Bulletin 30) said.

1. The 15 largest medical malpractice insurers have more than doubled their premiums in the past five years, but their claims payouts "have remained essentially flat," according to a new study commissioned by the **Center for Justice & Democracy**. In fact, some insurers sharply raised premiums while payouts were actually decreasing, and insurers recorded record surpluses in recent years, according to author **Jay Angoff** with **Roger Brown & Associates** in Jefferson City, MO.
2. New Jersey physician **Susan Kaufman** has no right to object to a malpractice settlement between an insurer and a patient, where the main defendant was a hospital and the insurance contract gives her input, the **Superior Court of New Jersey, Appellate Division** ruled (Docket No. A-3815-03T1). Because **Cooper Hospital/University Medical Center** was the sole named insured party, and the policy covered Kaufman as "other insured," she had no say in the settlement, which will reduce her ability to obtain malpractice insurance in future.
3. The more concerned about malpractice lawsuits emergency physicians are, the more likely they are to admit patients with cardiac symptoms and order more tests, according to a new survey from the **American College of Emergency Physicians**. The research, to be published in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, shows that fear of liability causes medically unnecessary services, says study author **David Katz**, a physician with **University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine** in Iowa City.
4. The **Drug Enforcement Administration** wrongly revoked Littleton, CO physician **Kathy Morall's** registration, which allowed her to dispense controlled substances, the **U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia** ruled (04-1367). The DEA had claimed Morall failed to keep proper drug records, but the court said the failure occurred over a short period during which Morall was understaffed and coping with her son's illness, and Morall agreed to take classes in record-keeping.