

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### REIMBURSEMENT: Prepare Now--Medicare Could Decimate Your Payments In January

#### But anesthesiologists boost their pay by one-third

The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** announced that your Medicare payments will drop 10.1 percent in January--even more than the 9.9-percent cut you were bracing for. Just imagine calculating all your payments with a conversion factor of 34.0682. That's the terrible reality you'll face in January unless Congress acts soon.

-This is disgraceful,- says **Maxine Lewis** with **Medical Coding Reimbursement Management** in Cincinnati. -Medicare Advantage groups have received an increase,- while doctors receive pay cuts. -How does the government believe that a business can operate on a reduction of 10 percent?- she asks. Doctors may have to limit the number of new Medicare patients they take on if this becomes final, she predicts.

-The legislature has always found a way to not really enforce these expected cuts but this may be the year [a reduction] really happens,- warns **Marcella Bucknam**, manager of compliance education with the **University of Washington Physicians**.

The looming cut is a good reason to make sure you've mastered the Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) to - get every penny out of the process,- adds Bucknam.

The new 2008 physician fee schedule final rule did offer some positive news:

- Your anesthesiologist will be getting a massive pay hike next year. CMS decided to go ahead and increase the work value of almost all anesthesia services by 32 percent.

**Tradeoff:** A raise for anesthesia means pay cuts for other doctors, notes Bucknam. Anesthesiologists see a total pay hike of 14 percent next year, but cardiologists, ED doctors, interventional radiologists, neurosurgeons and some other surgeons will all see a 2-percent drop in their payments due to work RVU and practice expense RVU changes.

And because anesthesiologists don't have as much overhead as other doctors, the pay hike may be a little excessive, say some experts.

Anesthesiologists can supervise up to four Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists, notes **Suzan Hvizdash**, physician educator for the **University of Pittsburgh Physicians Dept. of Surgery**.

- CMS is holding off on finalizing most of its controversial Stark self-referral rules.

Go online to [www.cms.hhs.gov/center/physician.asp](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/center/physician.asp) to see the new regulation.