

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### Some Insurers Cut Bariatric Surgery

While some insurers and Medicare carriers are liberalizing payment policies for bariatric surgeries, others are cutting back.

**Marcella Bucknam**, HIM coordinator at **Clarkson College** in Omaha, has seen a trend of payors seeing positive health effects from bariatric surgeries and loosening coverage requirements. Many Blue Cross/Blue Shield plans have taken the surgery off their list of procedures requiring prior certification, Bucknam adds.

But the **Center for Studying Health System Change** unveiled a new survey showing that many insurers are cutting back coverage for bariatric procedures as well as other big-ticket operations. At the same time, **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida** said it would end bariatric coverage in 2005, calling the surgeries "risky" and "of little benefit," according to **Reuters**. And Nebraska's Blues plan will follow suit.

New England Journal of Medicine correspondent Dr. **Robert Steinbrook** told Reuters that the number of bariatric procedures grew from around 16,000 a year in the early 1990s to 103,000 last year. Singer **Carnie Wilson** from **Wilson Philips** popularized the surgery by having hers broadcast on national television.