

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

Speech-Language: Private Practice SLPs, Say Hello to Medicare Provider Status

A lucky MIPPA provision gives SLPs the ticket

If you're a speech-language pathologist in private practice, you're in luck. The recently passed Medi-care Improvements for Patients and Providers Act, or MIPPA (H.R. 6331) included a provision giving SLPs in private practice the ability to enroll in the Medicare program, effective July 1, 2009.

"This bill brings us up to parity with the other two rehab disciplines," cheers **Ingrida Lulis**, director of federal policy and advocacy for the **American Speech-Language Hear-ing Association**. But even more important, "beneficiaries in rural and underserved areas will have better access to SLP services."

Prepare For Some Paperwork

You have about a year until your billing status goes live, but you'll need that time to complete the paperwork necessary to participate in the Medicare program. For starters, you must go through the Medicare enrollment process, Lulis says, which involves filling out a CMS-855 form.

For more information on Medi-care provider enrollment, as well as the 855 form, visit <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/cmsforms/downloads/cms855i.pdf>.

Next step: You'll need to obtain a National Provider Identifier (NPI) number if you don't already have one. This will be your ticket to filing your claims with Medicare. The enrollment window will probably be sometime late next spring so SLPs can start billing July 1, Lulis says.

Good idea: If you've been working in a facility setting and want to open a private practice, make sure you're up to speed on billing and coding issues -- or anything else the facility may have taken care of, Lulis suggests.

More Victories For SLPs

Wish you could participate in the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI)? Wish no more. Private practice status opens the door for SLPs to participate in PQRI. In addition, the MIPPA legislation allows audiologists to bill under the PQRI, Lulis says. "We're working with CMS on what measures would apply to SLPs and audiologists, and we're pushing for CMS to consider some measures in ASHA's outcomes tool, National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS), for the purpose of PQRI."

Stay tuned: CMS still has to write regulations and release manual guidance for SLPs in private practice. The agency also updates PQRI guidance in the fall, so be on the lookout for both.

For information now on getting started in Medicare provider enrollment, visit <http://www.asha.org/members/issues/reimbursement/medicare/medicarefaqs/privateprac.htm>.