

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

STUDIES & SURVEYS: Say Goodbye To Drug Reps -- And Gain An Extra \$12,000

Try this: Accept samples, but no chit chat

Ever hear the expression -There's no such thing as a free lunch-? This may be especially true when it comes to that free drug-rep pizza your doctors are snarfing.

Your doctor spends an average of 60 minutes per week talking to drug company reps, according to a study by **Health Strategies Group**. If your doctor used that time on four established-patient visits with Medi-care patients and billed 99213 for each of them, you-d collect about \$60 per visit.

That adds up to about \$240 per week and an extra \$12,000 over 50 weeks, according to an article in the Aug. 3 issue of Medical Economics magazine. Even if you cut that in half to account for overhead, your practice still clears an extra \$6,000 per year. And that's almost exactly the extra amount Forrest, IL, family practice physician **Benjamin Brewer** made when he stopped seeing drug reps, the Medical Economics report says.

There are 90,000 to 100,000 drug reps in the U.S., according to the report. Each visits roughly eight to 10 practices per day. Some practices only receive four visits a week, but -heavy prescribers- receive roughly 29 visits per week, according to Health Strategies Group. Most of those visits, 85 percent, were -drop-ins,- 10 percent were lunch dates and 5 percent were other appointments.

The article quotes one doctor who kept accepting free drug samples but stopped seeing reps face-to-face. That doctor unlocked an extra three hours per week to his schedule. And he's not alone. Doctors spent 20 percent less time with drug reps in 2004 than in 1999, **Health Strategies Group** reports.

Nearly four out of five doctors accept free drug samples, according to a recent study in The New England Journal of Medicine. And 83 percent of doctors eat catered meals on the reps- dime.