

MDS Alert

Diagnosis Coding: ICD-10 Implementation Poses a Good News, Bad News Scenario

CMS, AHIMA reps combat myths about the expanded diagnosis system.

ICD-10 implementation is looming ahead, and if you aren't ready to use the new system when it goes into effect on Oct. 1, 2013, don't count on having any wiggle room. That's the "cup half empty" view of implementation. The upside is that ICD-10 isn't really as daunting as it may seem initially. Those were two key messages from a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services-sponsored March Open Door Forum explaining the new diagnosis coding system.

A hard line: "I must stress quite strongly that Oct. 1, 2013, will be the date that everyone will begin to use ICD-10," said **Pat Brooks**, senior technical advisor with CMS, during the call. "There will be no grace period," she said. "In other words, we will not be slipping the date beyond Oct. 1, 2013, for ICD-10 codes, and this will be a compulsory implementation of this system," Brooks stressed.

CMS will not accept ICD-9 codes for any dates of service on or after Oct. 1, 2013, but will continue to process claims for services prior to that date "for a period of time," Brooks said.

Speaker Dispels ICD-10 Myths

To reduce confusion and concerns about the new coding system, **Sue Bowman** with the American Health Information Management Association addressed some misunderstanding shrouding the ICD-10 system, as follows:

- **There won't be any hard copy ICD-10 coding books.** Not true, said Bowman. "ICD-10-CM code books are actually already available from some publishers and are of a normal, manageable size," she said.
- **Payers will require much more detailed documentation to support coding.** Bowman also debunked that idea, noting that "much of the detail contained in ICD-10-CM is already in the medical record documentation, but it's just not being utilized because it's not needed for ICD-9 coding," she counseled.
- **ICD-10 won't be userfriendly.** One of the bigger myths regarding ICD-10 is that the increased number of codes will make ICD-10 impossible to use. Not so, Bowman said. "Just as the size of a dictionary doesn't make the dictionary more difficult to use, a higher number of codes doesn't necessarily increase the complexity of the coding," Bowman said. In fact, she noted, greater specificity and clinical accuracy should actually make ICD-10 easier to use.

Start Your ICD-10 Engines

Although you shouldn't start your intensive, in-depth ICD-10 training until six to nine months before implementation, you can prepare in other ways now, Bowman said.

To get ready for ICD-10, you should start identifying medical record documentation improvement opportunities, Bowman advised. ICD-10 won't require you to improve your documentation, but the higher quality your documentation is, the easier it will be to avoid using unspecified codes and the faster you'll find the accurate ICD-10 code. In addition, you can start learning the basic structure, organization, and unique features of ICD-10, and refresh your knowledge of biomedical concepts so you won't be tripped up by more enhanced code definitions and descriptions.

Resource: Brooks alerted callers to a new ICD-10-CM Quick Reference Information sheet, which can help you prepare for the change. The guide is available at www.cms.gov/icd10. Click "CMS sponsored calls" on the left, followed by the "2010 ICD-10 Conference Calls" download.

Editor's note: The original version of the above article ran in Part B Insider. For subscription information, call 1-800-508-2582.