

MDS Alert

MDS & Billing News

Wondering what's happening with the MDS 3.0? The instrument appears to be headed toward a pilot test. But don't look for a quick takeoff in terms of national implementation soon. The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** "is presently getting ready to go out into the field [with the instrument] in early 2006," said CMS' **Robert Connolly** at the Aug. 30 SNF/Long-Term Care Open Door Forum (ODF). CMS has been doing research on the MDS 3.0's new items in partnership with the Veterans Affairs and expects to have the research results in November, Connolly relayed.

Next on the agenda: CMS plans to conduct a pilot in March or April that will roll out to national testing for the MDS 3.0 in eight states shortly thereafter. Beyond that the dateline grows more vague: CMS is only committed to go through validation and reliability testing with results in 2007 but has not decided on an implementation date, Connolly said.

A proposed rule requires nursing facilities participating in Medicare and Medicaid to offer residents vaccinations against flu and pneumococcal disease unless contraindicated or the resident or his legal representatives refuses vaccination. In case of a flu vaccine shortage, state survey agencies would have the discretion not to cite facilities for being out of compliance with the requirement once it goes into effect. CMS expects the requirement to be in place for the flu season that's fast approaching, said the agency's **Sheila Lambowitz** at the Aug. 30 SNF ODF. To read the proposal online, go to the Federal Register at www.gpo.gov.

Be prepared: Therapy caps will raise their ugly heads again on Jan. 1. Without congressional action, the annual Part B rehab limitations--one for physical therapy and speech and language therapy and a separate one applied to occupational therapy--will take effect the first of the year. The limitation was originally \$1,500 but will be updated at year's end based on the Medicare Economic Index. The amount will probably be about \$1,750, according to a CMS representative speaking at the Aug. 30 SNF ODF.