

Health Information Compliance Alert

ICD-10: ICD-10 Date Will Be Postponed, HHS Confirms

Delay could offer practices additional time to prepare for new diagnosis coding system.

If you have been worrying about the looming Oct. 1, 2013 ICD-10 implementation date, you can breathe a small sigh of relief -- but don't rest for too long, experts warn.

HHS Delay Follows CMS Hints

On Feb. 16, 2012, the Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary **Kathleen G. Sebelius** announced that HHS would initiate a process to postpone the date by which certain health care entities have to comply with ICD-10. The new compliance date will be announced at a future date.

"ICD-10 codes are important to many positive improvements in our health care system," Sebelius said in the press release. "We have heard from many in the provider community who have concerns about the administrative burdens they face in the years ahead. We are committing to work with the provider community to reexamine the pace at which HHS and the nation implement these important improvements to our health care system."

The announcement followed hints that CMS was planning a pushback. On Feb. 14, acting CMS administrator **Marilynn Tavenner** said she intends to "re-examine the pace at which we implement ICD-10," which would require the agency to go through the standard federal rulemaking process. Tavenner made her comments to great applause at the American Medical Association's National Advocacy Conference, attendees said.

Physicians Are Cautiously Optimistic About Timeline

Keep in mind that neither the HHS nor CMS has announced just how much of a delay will take place, but physicians are pleased that they'll benefit from some additional time to implement the new diagnosis coding system.

"The American Medical Association appreciates Secretary Sebelius' swift response to address the AMA's serious concerns with ICD-10 implementation," said **Peter W. Carmel, M.D.**, president of the American Medical Association in a Feb. 16, 2012 press release. "The timing of the ICD-10 transition could not be worse for physicians as they are spending significant financial and administrative resources implementing electronic health records in their practices and trying to comply with multiple quality and health information technology programs that include penalties for noncompliance. Burdens on physician practices need to be reduced -- not created -- as the nation's health care system undertakes significant payment and delivery reforms."

Sebelius' statement appears to fall short of the AMA House of Delegates' original recommendation last fall, which was for a full repeal of ICD-10. However, a slower pace could at least buy time for practices that have not yet considered the impact of ICD-10 on their systems.

Stay on track: Despite the announcement of a slower timeline, you should continue to work toward compliance with the new diagnosis coding system, which appears to still be in place for future implementation.

"I think that even with a possible delay, practices should not put ICD-10 on the back burner," says **Barbara J. Cobuzzi, MBA, CPC, CENTC, CPCH, CPCP, CPC-I, CHCC**, president of CRN Healthcare Solutions, a consulting firm in Tinton Falls, N.J. "The delay probably will not be long and even though many of us think the number of codes offering the granularity that ICD-10 does is absurd, we are stuck with it. It will be coming, but due to the complexity of EHR implementation and meeting meaningful use standards, there just may be a short delay."

Keep an eye on these pages for more on this topic as CMS releases additional information about the adjusted ICD-10

timeline.

To read Sebelius' statement, visit www.hhs.gov/news/press/2012pres/02/20120216a.html.