

Health Information Compliance Alert

ICD-10 Update: Stay the Course with ICD-10 Preparations

Delay could prove more costly than continuing with the current implementation deadline.

Health providers and practices have been wondering how to make contingency plans ever since HHS Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** announced on Feb. 16 that the government would be delaying the deadline for ICD-10 diagnosis coding, but failed to designate a new implementation date.

Now the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has nailed down its proposed new deadline: Oct. 1, 2014. That's one year later than the October 2013 date currently in effect. CMS announced the proposal on April 9 as part of a rule that also includes other HIPAA-related provisions.

"Many provider groups have expressed serious concerns about their ability to meet the Oct. 1, 2013, compliance date," CMS says in a release. "The proposed change in the compliance date for ICD-10 would give providers and other covered entities more time to prepare and fully test their systems to ensure a smooth and coordinated transition to these new code sets."

Provider Community Offers Mixed Reviews

Some practices are breathing a sigh of relief that they have an extra year to switch to ICD-10. But others say that they are frustrated that their intensive ICD-10 preparation is getting stalled at this late date.

The American Medical Association, which was a vocal proponent of an ICD-10 implementation delay, cheered the news. "The American Medical Association and physicians across the nation appreciate that CMS has proposed delaying the ICD-10 implementation date to October 1, 2014," said **Peter W. Carmel, MD**, the AMA's president. "The postponement is the first of many steps that regulators need to take to reduce the number of costly, time-consuming regulatory burdens that physicians are shouldering."

Don't write the new ICD-10 deadline in pen quite yet, though. "ICD-10-CM is NOT delayed until October 1, 2014," coding expert **Lisa Selman-Holman** notes on her blog. The new deadline is merely a proposal. "The healthcare industry has the opportunity to comment on the proposal and THEN CMS can publish a final rule," notes Selman-Holman with Selman-Holman & Associates and CoDR -- Coding Done Right. The billions this delay is expected to cost providers may stymie the delay. "Only time will tell," Selman-Holman says. "The United States has long been behind the rest of the world in diagnosis coding. Nations already using ICD-10 are getting ready to transition to ICD-11 on October 1, 2015," she adds.

"Continuing to use an antiquated system like ICD-9-CM increases the regulatory burden," Selman-Holman says. "Health plans, hospital systems and other payers and providers, including HHS, have spent millions of dollars readying for ICD-10-CM. A delay now will increase the money spent and the time spent."

Don't Kick Back and Relax

Warning: Going back to the procrastination phase with your ICD-10 preparation could set you up for disaster. Instead, you should take the delay as an opportunity to surge ahead of schedule, rather than finding yourself scrambling to keep up, experts say.

CMS Accepting Comments On ICD-10 Delay Through May 17

Practices that have an opinion -- either positive or negative -- on the proposed new ICD-10 compliance date of Oct. 1, 2014, need to speak their minds by May 17. That's the deadline for submitting comments on the proposal to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Whichever side of the fence you inhabit, you can let HHS know how you feel by sending your comments to the agency by 5:00 pm (Eastern time) on May 17. You can either submit your comments via the Web site (www.regulations.gov) or by regular mail.