

Health Information Compliance Alert

Medicare: Don't Expect Electronic PECOS Signatures in the Near Future

CMS still wants certification statements.

You are eager to have your PECOS applications processed quickly -- and so is Medicare. And getting the forms right is the best way to expedite the process.

One large Medicare payer aimed to clear up confusion about the internet based provider, enrollment, chain and ownership system (PECOS). During a June 24 "Ask the Contractor" call, payer officials from National Government Services, a Medicare carrier in 20 states, reminded practices that Medicare contractors maintain different CMS-855 enrollment forms depending upon the practice type, said **Lindy Lady** of NGS's provider outreach and education department, during the call.

For instance, the CMS-855I applies to individual physicians or nonphysician practitioners (NPPs), whereas CMS-855B is for group practices or other organization suppliers other than durable medical equipment suppliers.

"PECOS allows physicians and nonphysician practitioners or third party staff on behalf of the physician or NPP to apply to enroll in the Medicare program or make changes to the enrollment information," Lady said. "Providers also may designate an authorized official who, once authenticated, can go and get others to be PECOS users."

Know PECOS Protocol Before Proceeding

Internet-based PECOS has many advantages, including making the enrollment process up to 50 percent faster, Lady noted. However, providers cannot use PECOS to change the provider's name or social security number or to change their existing business structure (for example, from a sole proprietorship to an LLC).

Return to sender: NGS will send internet-based enrollment applications back to providers if their office does not receive providers' signed certification statements and any supporting documentation within seven days of receiving the internet-based enrollment applications, Lady indicated.

Stamped signatures are not accepted on certification statements, and blue ink is recommended, Lady said during the call.

One caller questioned whether CMS might someday accept electronic signatures so the enrollment process won't be held up waiting for the certification statement. However, CMS officials indicated that they hadn't heard of any plans to change the process.

That said, the carrier shouldn't drag its feet for too long before it processes applications. CMS requires that Medicare contractors process 90 percent of the PECOS applications within 45 days of receiving the signed certification statement and supporting documentation, Lady noted.