

April 27, 2010

AMA/FEDERATION NEWS: National headlines, grassroots news and important AMA announcements for Federation executives and communicators.

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TOP STORIES

- 1. Congress delays Medicare payment cut again; tell Congress to repeal the SGR**

On April 15, President Obama signed H.R. 4851, the Continuing Extension Act of 2010, into law, reinstating Medicare physician payments to where they were on March 31 and again postponing the 21.3 percent cut that was supposed to take effect in 2010. This most recent extension of 2009 payment rates will continue through the end of May and will be applied retroactively to all physician services provided to Medicare patients in April.

The legislation passed the U.S. Senate on April 15 by a bipartisan vote of 59-38 and subsequently passed the U.S. House of Representatives shortly after by a bipartisan vote of 289-112.

Also on April 15, the hold on processing April claims that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) had placed to avoid implementing the payment cut technically expired. However, with congressional action so imminent, we do not believe many claims actually were processed at the lower payment rates. CMS has informed the AMA that any claims paid that reflected the 21.3 percent cut will be reprocessed automatically without any action required from physicians.

The AMA continues to work closely with House and Senate leadership offices and with White House officials on a long-term solution to the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula. Floor action in the House and Senate is expected by early June. Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/medicare-cut-delayed-june.shtml> to read a statement from AMA President J. James Rohack, MD, and visit <http://bit.ly/apQGhm> to view a blog post by Dr. Rohack on the temporary SGR fix.

Physicians can contact their members of Congress and insist that they support a repeal of Medicare's sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula. They can connect with their representatives and senators by calling the AMA's toll-free grassroots hotline at (800) 833-6354 or by visiting <http://www.capwiz.com/ama/issues/alert/?alertid=14937066&type=CO> and sending them an e-mail. Patients also can help by visiting <http://www.patientsactionnetwork.com/take-action> and contacting their members of Congress through the AMA Patients' Action Network.

2. AMA offers physicians help claiming damages from UnitedHealth settlement

A new online resource from the AMA can help thousands of physicians file claims in the record-breaking settlement reached in the AMA's legal victory against UnitedHealth Group—the nation's largest health insurer.

More than \$350 million is available to compensate physicians and their patients for 15 years of artificially low payments for out-of-network services, and this new resource provides physicians with step-by-step assistance in determining eligibility, assembling documentation and filing a claim under the terms of the settlement.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/advocacy/current-topics-advocacy/private-sector-advocacy/health-insurer-settlements/unitedhealth-ucr-settlement.shtml> to view this resource.

The deadline for filing a claim to share in the settlement fund is Oct. 5. The settlement claims administrator began mailing the settlement notice and claim forms to physicians April 16. Physicians should keep an eye out for their claim forms, which contain important information that can help with filing the claim.

In addition, AMA members can get personal assistance with filing a claim from the AMA's Practice Management Center by visiting www.ama-assn.org/go/pmc or calling (800) 621-8335.

FEDERATION NEWS

3. Compliance deadlines approaching for “5010” standard transactions, ICD-10 code sets

To avoid disruptions in cash flow and transaction processing, physician practices must be ready to send and receive only the updated version of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) electronic transactions, commonly known as “5010,” beginning Jan. 1, 2012.

To meet this deadline, practices will need to begin testing the upgraded electronic administrative transactions with their trading partners in 2011. In addition to the 5010 transactions, the ICD-10 code set must be used for all services provided beginning Oct. 1, 2013.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which oversees compliance of the HIPAA standard transactions and code sets, has made it clear that the compliance deadlines will not be extended. In fact, Medicare expects to begin testing the 5010 transactions with physicians and other health care providers in 2011.

With these deadlines approaching fast, the AMA has prepared various resources to help physicians implement the 5010 standard transactions and ICD-10 code sets. Additional resources will be available in the coming months.

Visit www.ama-assn.org/go/5010 to view resources related to the 5010 standard transactions.

Visit www.ama-assn.org/go/icd-10 to view resources related to the ICD-10 code sets.

4. Connecticut primary care physician survey shows shortage threatens patients' access to care

On April 14, the Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS) released the results of the state's first study of the primary care physician work force—"The Connecticut 2009 Primary Care Survey: Physician Satisfaction, Physician Supply and Patient Access to Medical Care"—which revealed that Connecticut's primary-care capacity is already stretched very thin. Twenty-eight percent of internists and 26 percent of family physicians were not accepting new patients. In addition, on average, new patients faced a wait of 18 days for a routine office visit.

"These results of the study are exactly the reason why we thought it was important to take a detailed look at Connecticut's primary care situation today," CSMS President Kathleen LaVorgna, MD, said. "This report tells us that Connecticut has a limited capacity to care for more patients who require primary care services, and the clock is ticking."

Visit

https://www.csms.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2590&Itemid=224 to learn more about the study. Results were released in advance of its publication in the May issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Connecticut Medicine*.

5. Oregon governor vetoes psychology prescribing bill

Physicians and patients in Oregon received good news earlier this month when Gov. Ted Kulongoski vetoed legislation that would have allowed psychologists to prescribe psychotropic medication. Without the veto, Oregon would have become the third state to give prescribing authority to psychologists.

The Oregon Medical Association (OMA) strongly advocated for the governor to veto the bill, and the OMA had the support of numerous medical societies, including the American Psychiatric Association and the AMA. The OMA used the AMA Scope of Practice Data Series for psychologists to emphasize the lack of education and training for psychologists to safely prescribe psychotropic drugs, and the AMA also urged the governor to veto the bill in a March 18 letter. The AMA congratulates the OMA on this important victory.

AMA members can visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/sop> to learn more about the AMA's work on scope-of-practice issues.

PUBLIC HEALTH

6. Online program features prescribing for Alzheimer's disease

State and national prescribing information for Alzheimer’s disease, as well as evidence-based treatment guidelines, are discussed in the latest *AMA Therapeutic Insights*—a free online quarterly newsletter featuring a different disease in each issue. Aimed at enhancing physician knowledge and practice and ultimately improving the quality of patient care, each newsletter offers *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/therapeuticinsights> to access this issue as well as previous issues featuring hypertension, insomnia and Parkinson’s disease.

The American Medical Association is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

7. CDC report shows U.S. can do more to curb tobacco use

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s *Tobacco Control State Highlights 2010* report shows that nearly half of states have passed comprehensive smoke-free laws and that 14 states and Washington, D.C., have raised taxes on cigarettes.

“This report shows that while progress has been made in some areas of tobacco control, states need to focus on enacting policies proven to have the greatest impact on lowering tobacco use, such as raising tobacco taxes, passing comprehensive smoke-free laws and developing hard-hitting media campaigns,” said AMA Trustee Mary Anne McCaffree, MD. “These actions can help limit exposure to secondhand smoke and discourage cigarette use. We urge states that haven’t taken these steps to consider doing so for the health of their residents.”

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/cdc-tobacco-report.shtml> to read Dr. McCaffree’s full statement about the report.

Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco> to learn more about *Tobacco Control State Highlights 2010*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

8. May 19 webinar to cover patient safety in medical education

In addressing medical errors, how do we evolve beyond “shame and blame” toward real reform and redesign of the care system? And how do we move beyond checklists and a narrow, process-oriented focus to bring about change in the broader system and structure of medical education and practice? Physicians are invited to explore these and other topics during the AMA-sponsored webinar

“Patient safety 101: It’s the system, stupid (or, It’s the stupid system)” at 1 p.m. Eastern time May 19.

Nationally known patient safety expert John Gosbee, MD, a health care specialist at Red Forest Consulting, LLC, and the University of Michigan, will present the program, which also will look at safety as a team sport, ways to fill the gaps in health professions education and training in patient safety, and how to meld “meaningful use” with meaningful patient safety improvements. All health professionals, health professions students, educators and patient safety experts are encouraged to participate. Cost is \$79 per site for AMA members and \$99 per site for nonmembers.

Visit <http://eo2.commpartners.com/users/ama/session.php?id=4424> to register.

9. In *American Medical News*: Physician profiling found wrong 22 percent of time

Research mimicking the types of cost-profiling tiering programs health plans have used found that physicians are at a strikingly high risk of being miscategorized when rated by such programs, according to a story by *American Medical News*.

A study funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor and conducted by researchers at RAND Corp. outlined the outcome of a mock profiling program using claims from four Massachusetts health plans. Using the insurers’ claims from 2004 and 2005, researchers found that the model two-tier program misclassified as many as 22 percent of physicians, and that about two-thirds of physicians’ designations would be less than “optimally reliable,” *American Medical News* reports.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/amednews/2010/04/12/bisa0412.htm> to view the *American Medical News* story.

10. Save the date: AMA-MSS Medical Specialty Showcase in June in Chicago

All specialty societies seated in the AMA House of Delegates are invited to participate in the seventh annual AMA Medical Student Section (MSS) 2010 Medical Specialty Showcase taking place June 12 during the AMA-MSS Annual Assembly Meeting at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

The AMA-MSS Annual Assembly Meeting consistently attracts more than 600 medical students from across the United States. The purpose of the event is to introduce medical students to each specialty and to provide promotional materials to help them make decisions about their career.

Medical students have emphasized the importance of obtaining more comprehensive information on medical specialties before entering the residency selection process. The showcase presents an excellent opportunity to educate these students on the attributes of each specialty, to mentor students interested in a particular field and to encourage these young leaders to maintain active participation in organizations after medical school.

For registration information, visit www.ama-assn.org/go/mssannual or contact Katherine Torres-Hertz of the AMA-MSS at katherine.torres-hertz@ama-assn.org.

Sent by the American Medical Association, 515 N. State St., Chicago, IL 60654, (312) 464-5000.

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