

Socioeconomic tips

Changes to CMS Medicare Internet resources

by the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has redesigned its online educational material for physicians. The Web page, Physicians Information Resource for Medicare (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/physicians>), is a portal to CMS Web links to help you and your staff access current Medicare regulations, publications, and databases. The Web links are categorized under the topics of participation, enrollment, education, program integrity/medical review, regulations, payment, Medicare secondary payor, and contacts. The following is a description of some items that may be of special interest to surgeons.

Medicare coverage database

CMS has incorporated its national coverage determinations, the draft and final versions of Medicare Part B carriers' local carrier determinations (formerly called local medical review policies), and national coverage analyses into the Internet-based CMS Medicare coverage database (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/coverage/default.asp>). A search of the database will allow you to determine whether CMS or Part B carriers are considering or have developed national or local payment decisions for procedures surgeons perform.

CCI edits

The national Correct Coding Initiative (CCI) edits are now available for free download from the CMS Web site at <http://www.cms.gov/physicians/cciedits>. The CCI edits identify pairs of services that normally should not be billed by the same physician for the same patient on the same day and identify whether specific Current Procedural Terminology and Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System modifiers may be used to override certain edits. Surgeons and their staffs should check this Web page on a quarterly basis (January, April, July, and October) to download the most current version of the CCI edits.

Around the corner

June

- Economedix teleconferences are scheduled as follows: CPT Coding Updates for Surgeons (June 9 and 12) and E/M Coding...Beyond the Basics (June 23 and 26). For more information and to register, go to <http://yourmedpractice.com/ACS-Teleconference>.
- ACS-sponsored basic and advanced coding courses and practice management course for surgeons will be held June 24-26 in Atlanta, GA. Visit the ACS coding and practice management course Web page at <http://www.facs.org/dept/ahp/workshops> to register.

New policy page

To help physicians better understand regulatory and policy changes, CMS recently introduced the publication, "Medlearn Matters...Information for Medicare Providers." This series of articles translates regulatory language into an easily understood format. Each article provides guidance about the effective date of a policy change, which provider groups are affected by the policy, what providers need to do to comply with the policy, and a brief explanation of why the change will be implemented. The articles can be viewed and downloaded in Adobe Acrobat format (PDF) at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn/matters>.

Medicare resident and new physician guide

Though not as current as the resources available online and not specifically designed for surgeons, the publication, "Medicare Resident and New Physician Guide: A Comprehensive Guide Designed to Inform Physicians About the Medicare Program," is a good resource about physician participation in

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considered ethical at this time, including tax credits, reimbursement of expenses, recognition awards, paid medical leave, priority on the waiting list for previous live donors, life and disability insurance, and medical coverage for expenses, she said.

An ethical incentive is offered free of financial or emotional coercion, Ms. Dubler said. For example, "sale of organs in India is a fact of economic and medical existence—sale under economic duress," she said. In the U.S., "family dynamics sometimes require donation when that would not be the free choice of the donor—donation under emotional duress."

Alternatives

Alternatives to live organ donations do exist. One option is to ensure that people lead healthy lifestyles, so that they don't develop the types of diseases that often can be cured only through transplant operations. "Seven out of 10 Americans die of chronic diseases, most of which are preventable," Dr. Carmona noted, including those linked to obesity, alcohol and drug abuse, and tobacco use.

Robert Harmon, MD, MPH, president of the American College of Preventive Medicine and national medical director of Optimum/United Health Group, said, "Without more donated organs, disease management is one of our only alternatives." Disease management services are provided in three stages, Dr. Harmon said. Primary services involve intervention before the onset of symptoms, an example being immunization. Secondary services include early detection and treatment, such as controlling hypertension to prevent kidney disease. The third level is tertiary care, or the management of complications and disability.

Mehmet Oz, MD, FACS, vice-chair of surgery and professor of cardiac surgery at Columbia University, New York, NY, spoke about prevention as it relates to heart disease. He noted that variables predictive of cardiac events include heart function, female gender, depression, and living alone. Dr. Oz also said that the public particularly needs to become more aware of the deleterious effects of obesity and gain a better understanding of which foods are the highest in calories and

of the positive impact of moderate exercise.


David H. Sachs, MD, director of the Transplantation Biology Research Center and Paul S. Russell/Warner-Lambert Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School, spoke about another alternative—xenotransplantation. Dr. Sachs said the field of transplantation is inhibited by treatment-related complications, chronic rejection of transplanted organs and tissue, and the shortage of organs. He noted that other mammals could eventually be sources of organs and tissue, the most viable being nonhuman primates and pigs. In fact, studies currently are being conducted regarding kidney xenotransplants with pig donors and ape recipients. Efforts also are under way to genetically engineer pigs as xenograft donors.

Long-term project

As follow-up to this meeting and its roundtable discussions, the JCAHO intends to release a white paper on the organ transplantation issue later this year. "We don't intend to stop until the problems are solved, so this project will probably continue for a long time," Dr. O'Leary said.

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the Medicare program. The guide can be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat format (PDF) at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn/medicare%20resident-v2.pdf>.

For surgical practices without Internet access, most of the information discussed in this article is regularly distributed in Part B carrier bulletins. 

This column responds to questions from the Fellows and their staffs, and provides useful tips for surgical practices. Developed by the College staff and consultants, this information will be accessible on our Web site. If you would like to see specific topics addressed in future columns, please contact the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy by fax at 202/337-4271, or e-mail HealthPolicyAdvocacy@facs.org.