

# Socioeconomic tips

## Medicare updates

by the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy

Practices that submitted Medicare claims in late February may find that their reimbursement is incorrect. Claims for services performed in January and February should be paid based on 2002 rates, but carriers installed the higher 2003 payment rates when they took effect March 1. Medicare carriers should automatically adjust payment for these claims after July 1, so they are paid at the 2002 rates.

We have seen that 2003 rates generally reflect a 1.6 percent increase over 2002 rates. The payment for 2002 claims at 2003 rates translate as overpayment for Medicare claims. Overpayment would particularly be likely for surgeons who changed their Medicare participation status from participating to nonparticipating.

Part B carriers will recoup overpayment for January and February 2003 Medicare claims using normal carrier procedures for solicited refunds. This means that practices that were overpaid will receive an invoice letter from their Part B carriers requesting a refund. When making payment, include a copy of the letter with the repayment check.

### **CMS resource Web page**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have redesigned their Web page, "Physicians Information Resource for Medicare." The Web page offers easy access for anyone who wants to search Medicare resources through an alphabetical listing of links. The current major topics include physician participation and enrollment in Medicare, policies and regulations, program integrity, medical review, Part B carrier and regional CMS contact information, payment and billing, educational materials, and opportunities. Material about Medicare and related CMS publications, such as the "Medicare Resident and New Physician Guide," can be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format.

Searchable databases provide official CMS guidance on Medicare and the aspects of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

### **Around the corner**

#### **July**

- Quarterly update to 2003 Medicare fee schedule effective July 1.
- Quarterly update to 2003 Correct Coding Edits effective July 1.
- ACS-sponsored basic and advanced coding workshops for surgeons July 17-18 in Boston, MA. To register, visit the ACS coding workshop Web page at <http://www.facs.org/dept/hpa/workshops/cdworkshop.html>.

#### **August**

- ACS-sponsored practice management course for surgeons August 23 in St. Louis, MO. Visit the ACS Web page at <http://www.facs.org/dept/hpa/workshops/pmworkshop.html> to register.

over which CMS has jurisdiction. CMS maintains Medicare and HIPAA "frequently asked questions" Web pages. These resources offer easy-to-understand answers about the basics of both programs and let interested parties register to receive e-mail notification if new information is posted for a specific question. It also offers opportunities to advise CMS about the usefulness of the information.

The newest database is the "Physician Fee Schedule Look-Up." This program allows you to search the Medicare fee schedule by CPT and HCPCS code for fee schedule amounts and geographic practice cost indices (GPCIs) for every carrier and payment locality. It also contains payment policy information. The user can look up a single HCPCS code, a list of up to five codes, or a range of codes and retrieve payment information by the national relative value unit base. If fee schedule payment amounts in a surgeon's state differ by locale, it also allows the user to retrieve information by specific carrier and state locality. We would offer a word of caution in that the


*continued on page 44*

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## **SOCIOECONOMIC TIPS, from page 28**

program does not contain a legend to explain some of the accessible information. For instance, codes for surgical procedures provide payment policy indicators for assistants at surgery, but unless the user already knows what indicator code “2” means, it is difficult to understand CMS payment policy for a specific procedure.

CMS also offers subscriptions to its Physician ListServ. Individuals who register their e-mail addresses with ListServ, which is managed by the National Institutes of Health, will receive updates directly from CMS when changes to Medicare policies

are announced. The Web address for “Physicians Information Resource for Medicare” is <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/physicians>. 

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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 by e-mail at [AHP@facs.org](mailto:AHP@facs.org).

## Next month in *JACS*

The July issue of the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* will feature:

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### Original Scientific Articles:

- Cost of Urgent Cholecystectomy
- FDG-PET for Rectal Cancer Recurrence

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### Palliative Care:

Cancer Cachexia

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### Symposium:

Controversies in DCIS of the Breast

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### What's New in Surgery:

- General Thoracic Surgery
- Otolaryngology

