

Temporary “Doc Fix” Agreement Delays ICD-10 Implementation: Although CMS adamantly opposed any delay to the October 1, 2014 ICD-10 implementation date, the Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014 contains a provision where CMS will have no choice but to postpone implementation of ICD-10 for at least one year. The American Health Information Management Association has already asked for clarification of the critical term “at least one year” as it could lead to speculation that implementation may be delayed more than one year. ICD-10 implementation is now postponed to at least October 1, 2015.

CMS Reveals Medicare Part B Physician Payments: CMS released the data in response to demands for transparency in the wake of a court case requiring the agency to provide public access to physician billing records. Analysts sifting through the data in the coming days and weeks will try to shed light on payment trends and expose outliers among services and providers. Insurers and government payers will use the data to identify high-cost providers and spot inter- and intra-regional variations in the patterns of care. One of the reasons CMS officials gave for releasing the data was to aid in the search for healthcare fraud and abuse, particularly by exposing statistical outliers.

United States Senate Committee on Finance Supports Increased Notice and Appeal Timeframes from CMS: The United States Senate Committee on Finance recently wrote to CMS supporting CMS’ proposal to improve beneficiary notices such as the Annual Notice of Change to contain a clear explanation of an enrollee’s rights if a plan terminates a provider from its network. Medicare Advantage (“MA”) networks should provide CMS information about the steps the plan will take to ensure affected enrollees can locate new providers that meet their individual needs. CMS should also ensure affected providers have sufficient time to exercise their appeal rights before enrollees are notified of network changes. These safeguards are intended to help beneficiaries understand what the provider networks in their MA plan will look like before they have to make decisions about enrolling in a particular plan.

Proposed Bill Seeks to Align Mental Health Privileges: In an effort to reorganize and bring clarity to the varying degrees of protection afforded to different mental health professionals, a new rule has been proposed in New Jersey seeking to establish one unified mental health service provider evidentiary privilege. The special subcommittee headed by Appellate Division Judge Mitchel Ostrer found that currently, privilege “often depends on the license or professional credentials of the provider” and current evidence rules “provide for different and sometimes inconsistent privileges.” This leads to disparate treatment of privilege amongst different types of professionals, which the subcommittee found “difficult to justify” given the policy goals of encouraging the utilization of mental health services and ensuring the patients’ privacy, regardless of the provider. The Supreme Court Committee on the Rules of Evidence released the draft proposal and is seeking comments by June 2, 2014.

For more information on the above items, contact Kern Augustine Conroy & Schoppmann, P.C. at 1-800-445-0954 or via email at info@DrLaw.com.



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