Reimbursement Cut for Fast In-Office HbA_{1c} Test

BY JANE ANDERSON
Contributing Writer

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will cut reimbursement for physicians who provide their diabetic patients with point-of-care hemoglobin A_{1c} testing using a "glycosylated Hb home device" from about $21 a test to about $13.50 a test on April 1, a coding expert from the American Academy of Family Physicians said.

The reimbursement cut was mandated by a provision in the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Extension Act of 2007, enacted at the end of last year. That provision reverses a decision by CMS in late 2006 to increase reimbursement for the HbA_{1c} test, said AAFP coding specialist Cynthia Hughes, who noted that AAFP had lobbied hard for several years for the increase in reimbursement. "It was slipped into SCHIP," Ms. Hughes said. "It would take another act of Congress to reverse it."

The language added to the SCHIP legislation states that point-of-care HbA_{1c} testing using the kit and billed under CPT code 83037 should be paid at the same rate as HbA_{1c} testing done with an in-office analyzer in a physician's office or laboratory setting and billed with CPT code 83036.

Ms. Hughes said that the average cost to physicians' offices for each test kit is about $13, but that costs also include shipping and handling of the kits themselves, staff time to administer the test, supplies, and additional overhead expenses. AAFP has suggested to CMS that an appropriate payment—one that takes into account all the costs of purchasing and administering the test—would be more than $34.

Providing the test at the point of care is more convenient for the patient and augments care because the test results are available in just a few minutes, in time for the physician to counsel the patient about those results, Ms. Hughes said.

The decreased reimbursement for the test kits could lead to fewer patients receiving the HbA_{1c} test at the point of care, Ms. Hughes said. ■

Updated Web Site on Quality Reporting

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has revamped the Web site for the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative.

The revised site provides easier access to 2008 information and resources. The site also includes downloadable documents with quality measurement specifications and information for eligible health care providers. For more information, visit www.cms.hhs.gov/PQRI. ■

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