

## Permanent Fix Unlikely, for Now

Physician Fees from page 1

2008. Some 900,000 doctors participate in Medicare, according to the CMS.

The 1,481-page rule announcing the fee schedule also contains many other changes in how physicians are reimbursed for various services, and what types of services are covered.

Among the biggest changes: anesthesiologists are due to get a 32% increase in their work value, a result of a recommendation by the American Medical Association's Relative Value Update Committee.

But anesthesiologists still will feel the pinch of the 10.1% overall cut.

The 10.1% cut is a direct result of Congress failing to come up with an alternative to the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR), the formula that sets physician payment rates partly on the growth in the gross domestic product.

For the last 5 years, Congress has at the last minute disregarded the Sustainable Growth Rate and legislated temporary 1- or 2-year adjustments in payments. Last

fall, legislators froze 2007 payment rates at 2006 levels, averting a slated 5% cut, but setting the stage for a 10% cut in 2008 because, by law, the 5% had to be accounted for at some point.

Physician organizations have sought a permanent replacement of the SGR, so far in vain.

Dr. Charles noted, "I don't think it was Congress's intention necessarily to create this situation" of using the SGR. "Physicians would like nothing more than to have this problem off the table and have fees every year that would track along with the cost to operate our medical practice."

Nevertheless, an SGR replacement is unlikely as the congressional sessions wind down this year, said Dr. Charles, who also is director of the Movement Disorders Clinic at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, Tenn.

Instead, the battle again will be to reverse the cuts, at least for 2 years, and to find a way to cover the payments. Congress is required to offset any new spending.

A statement issued by the AAN reads: "The AAN supports legislation to avert pending Medicare physician payment cuts in 2008 and beyond. As has been advised by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, the AAN also recommends that

## F Y I

### Stroke Training DVD

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke has released version 2.0 of "Know Stroke," the interactive DVD that explains how to use and score the NIH Stroke Scale. The two-disc set includes demonstration cases and certification sets. For additional information, or to contact NINDS, visit the Web site online at [www.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.ninds.nih.gov).

### Online AAN Self-Exam

A new online self-assessment examination in clinical neurology, designed to help maintain certification by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, is being offered by the American Academy of Neurology. The exam consists of 100 questions and is based on the ABPN's cognitive examination for recertification in clinical neurology.

Twenty topics will be tested, with the most questions focusing on headache and other pain syndromes; epilepsy; cerebrovascular disease; and aging, dementia, and other degenerative disorders. Users may choose to take the exam as a timed test, or without being timed, and have the option to receive immediate feedback following each question's completion. Users may also compare their scores to other test takers'.

The cost for the multiple-choice exam is \$99 for AAN members and \$149 for non-members. For more information and to take the test, visit [www.aan.com](http://www.aan.com).

### Coping With Dementia Booklet

"What Happens Next?" is a 12-page booklet designed to answer patients' questions about early-stage dementia. It includes a list of support groups and services as well as information about available research trials. It is published by the National Institute on Aging's Alzheimer's Disease Center in Chicago. For more information visit the Web site at [www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/WhatHappensNext.htm](http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/WhatHappensNext.htm).

### Creatine for Parkinson's in Phase III

A large, phase III, double-blind, placebo-controlled study aims to determine whether the nutritional supplement creatine can slow the progression of Parkinson's disease. The study, launched by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke will enroll 1720 people at 51 medical centers across the United States and Canada. For additional information, visit the Web site at [www.parkinsontrial.ninds.nih.gov](http://www.parkinsontrial.ninds.nih.gov).

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