

PQRI Could Lead to True Pay for Performance

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SAN DIEGO — Within the next few years, Medicare is likely to move from a system of pay for reporting to pay for performance, Jeff Flick, a regional administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said at the annual meeting of the American College of Physicians.

Mr. Flick, who is based in San Francisco, predicted that Congress is likely to approve funds to continue the Medicare Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) in 2008. However, in future years the program is likely to convert to a pay-for-performance system, he said, which could be similar to the system being developed for hospital value-based purchasing.

"I believe we're not going to move away from this," he said.

PQRI is a voluntary program that will let physicians earn a bonus of up to 1.5% of their total allowed Medicare charges during the last 6 months of 2007 for reporting on certain quality measures.

Congress authorized the establishment of the 6-month pay-for-reporting program last December as part of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006. Changes to PQRI—and actual implementation of a pay-for-performance system—would require additional legislation from Congress.

Officials at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have selected 74 quali-

ty measures that can be used by physicians across specialties. If four or more measures apply, physicians must report on at least three measures for at least 80% of cases in which the measure was reportable. If no more than three measures apply, each measure must be reported for at least 80% of the cases in which a measure was reportable, according to CMS.

ACP has estimated that the typical internist will be able to earn about \$1,500 for reporting over the 6-month period. But the

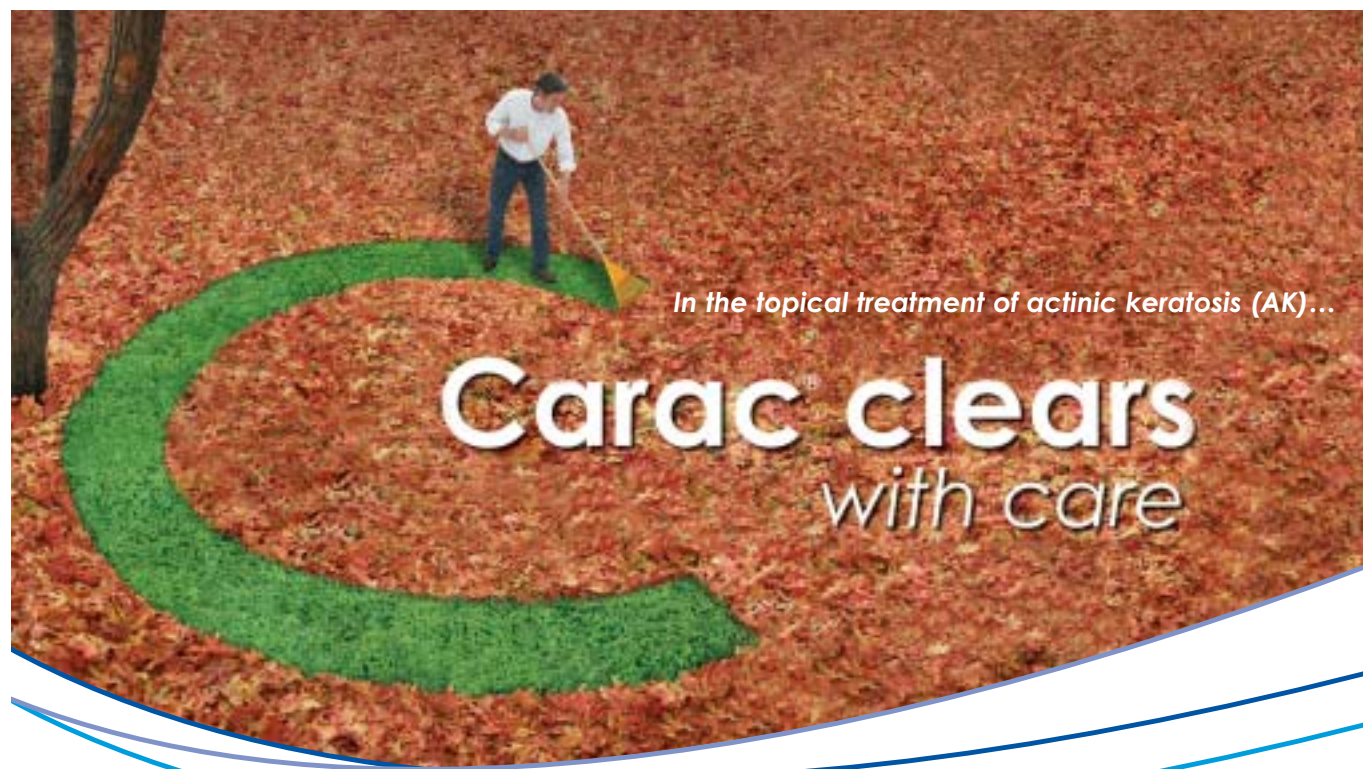
amount earned will depend on the case mix of the practice, said Robert Doherty, senior vice president for governmental affairs and public policy at ACP.

"If you look at this program, it's one that can teach us a lot for the future. It's not the answer," Mr. Doherty said. "But if you do participate, you'll learn a lot about the program."

But physicians who choose to participate in the program will have a chance to learn about the quality of care they are

providing and to get ready for pay for performance, Mr. Flick said. Physicians will also be sending the message to Congress that they are not afraid of quality, he said.

What is fundamentally driving the program is the need to move toward value, he said. CMS is currently receiving data on hospital, home health, and nursing home quality, but not on physicians. "We need data. We need to begin to understand information on quality of care," Mr. Flick said. ■



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