March-April 2009

NCDS u date

A Billing Industry Newsletter for Clients

Keeping your office up-to-date on industry and insurance changes, late-breaking billing & reimbursement news, and general inter-office communication…

Industry Outlook 2009

By Mick Polo, President, NCDS

Congress granted another last minute save to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule to start the year with an overall +1.1% increase for calendar year 2009 but what has happened since?

With the concerns facing the overall economy, NCDS has been closely monitoring the impact these changes have had and will have on healthcare in Ohio and the surrounding region and what it means to your medical practices. Some important questions:

- How will these Medicare changes affect reimbursements?
- What changes will the new President and Congress bring?
- Will job losses increase the number of uninsured patients?
- How will unemployment rates influence the ability for patients to pay their portion out of pocket for deductibles, copays, etc?
- Will the recession deter people from seeking medical care?

In 2009 NCDS has observed an increased number of cancellations and rescheduled appointments primarily due to severe winter weather in January and February. As the population demographic changes and baby boomers are now at or approaching retirement age, the number of "snowbirds" going south for the winter months looking to avoid the cold weather has increased. These factors coupled together to lower billing totals because fewer patients were available for services. Along with a looming uncertainty about the general economic conditions this year started slowly with below average patient visit volume coming off the holiday season.

Patient payments have slowed –1.3% since the economic downturn last October. Neither office nor hospital volumes have shown any unusual variations but there has been a noticeable decline in billings for diagnostic or preventative office testing and non-emergent or elective hospital procedures. While these ancillary services have been impacted, most routine medical care appears steady.

Now that spring is here we have noticed an appreciable increase in business through March. Though no industry is truly "recession proof" health care is likely the last one drawn into and first one to come out of a downturn. We are continuing to watch business closely and are cautious but optimistic about the prospects for 2009.

Trends vary by specialty, geographic area and impact all practices differently. Please contact your NCDS representative for details, analysis, and how to plan accordingly for the remainder of this year.

"A typical physician faxes more than 1,504 pages per month." – Jonathan Bush, CEO, athenahealth

Stop faxing and start scanning. *Don't be typical*, use technology get more money faster. Reduce your costs on long distance charges, save time waiting for the fax to send and fighting with jammed pages, improve billing turnaround time and increase your cash flow by days or even weeks! Use an NCDS supported scanner to receive free setup, installation and training. Contact Dave or Mick Polo to learn more.

No Paper, No Problems! Scan Your Billings to NCDS now!

Important Change in Frontpath Professional Reimbursement Methodology

According to a recent Frontpath Health Coalition correspondence the reimbursement methodology for all contracted physicians effective April 1, 2009 is being revised to incorporate the CMS site of service differential. This means there will be separate allowables depending on whether the services are provided in a facility (hospital, ASC, etc) or office setting.

The actual percentage of the CMS reimbursements used to calculate your Frontpath payments has not changed and where this is consistent with other carriers in the market this will significantly reduce your reimbursement from Frontpath, one of the top payers in the past. If you perform procedures or rounds on patients in the hospital you should contact Carol Barnard at Frontpath, 419-891-5206 ext. 101, to voice your concerns and obtain information by CPT code specific to your agreement.

Molina Medicaid MCP Coming Soon To Northwest Ohio Counties

The ODJFS is scheduled to award the contract for a new Managed Care Medicaid Plan for Lucas County to Molina on May 4, 2009 with implementation scheduled for September 1, 2009.

You will need to be contracted with Molina to be reimbursed for services. Please contact NCDS if you have more questions on how to participate or visit www.molinahealthcare.com.

E-prescribing (a prescriber's ability to electronically send an accurate, error-free and understandable prescription directly to a pharmacy from the point-of-care) is an important element in improving the quality of patient care. The inclusion of electronic prescribing in the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) of 2003 gave momentum to the movement, and the July 2006 Institute of Medicine report on the role of e-prescribing in reducing medication errors has received widespread publicity, helping to build awareness of e-prescribing's role in enhancing patient safety. Developing the standards that will facilitate e-prescribing is one of the key action items in the governments plan to expedite the adoption of electronic medical records and build a national electronic health information infrastructure in the United States. ***cms.hhs.gov/eprescribing***

If you are using an EMR/EHR or E-prescribing system contact NCDS for a copy of "Medicare's Practical Guide to the E-prescribing Incentive Program" to learn how to use the proper reporting codes for a potential bonus from Medicare. *See the "E-prescribing Incentive Program Quick Reference: G-Codes" on the following page for details on the reporting codes.

*Continued from the previous page.

E-prescribing Incentive Program Quick Reference: G -Codes	
If You…	**Report**
Used a qualified e-prescribing system for all of the prescriptions	G8443
Had a qualified e-prescribing system, but didn't generate any prescriptions during this encounter	G8445
Had a qualified e-prescribing system, but could not electronically submit one or more of the generated prescriptions because: • The prescription was for narcotics or other controlled substances. • State or Federal law required you to phone in or print the prescriptions. • The patient asked that you phone in or print the prescriptions. • The pharmacy system was unable to receive an electronic transmission.	G8446

Economic Stimulus Includes Numerous Health Initiatives

HBMA Government Relations Washington Report –February 2009

On February 17th President Obama signed H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (AKA economic stimulus bill), into law. With one stroke of the pen, the President signed the single largest spending bill ever passed in the history of our country.

The bill is over 1,000 pages long and it includes nearly $800 BILLION in new spending.

Some of the key health provisions in the Economic Stimulus

- Expands HIPAA privacy protections to include business associates as statutorily covered entities.
- Directed $400 Million dollars to the Department of Health and Human Services to conduct comparative effectiveness research. In addition the Institute of Medicine is directed to produce and submit a report to the Congress that includes recommendations on the national priorities for comparative effectiveness research.
- Establishes the Federal Coordinating Council for Comparative Effectiveness Research.
- Provides financial incentives for physicians, hospitals and certain other providers for the "meaningful use" of certified EHR systems beginning in 2011.
- Directs HHS through the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, to set standards for ensuring the interoperability of Health Information Technology.
- Provides $1.5 Billion in NEW spending for Community Health Center construction and renovation.

On February 24th, President Obama appeared before a joint session of Congress to outline his agenda for the 111th Congress. Healthcare Reform was a major theme of his address.

If you visit the White House health reform page at http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/health_care/ you can see more information about the president's plans.

As members of the HBMA, NCDS has a voice and representation in Washington DC. Lobbying groups convey our needs in the third party medical billing industry and our physician clients' needs too. They listen and respond. Hard working associates on Capitol Hill are informing our leaders about the real financial, administrative and business impact of the laws they debate. This is another extraordinary benefit you receive working with NCDS.

Watch for more news from Washington in our next edition!

Employee / Family Corner

A special "hello" from the newest member of the NCDS family, Emily Elizabeth Polo! The daughter of Sarah and Mick also brings special congratulations to first time NCDS grandparents Michael and Cheryle.

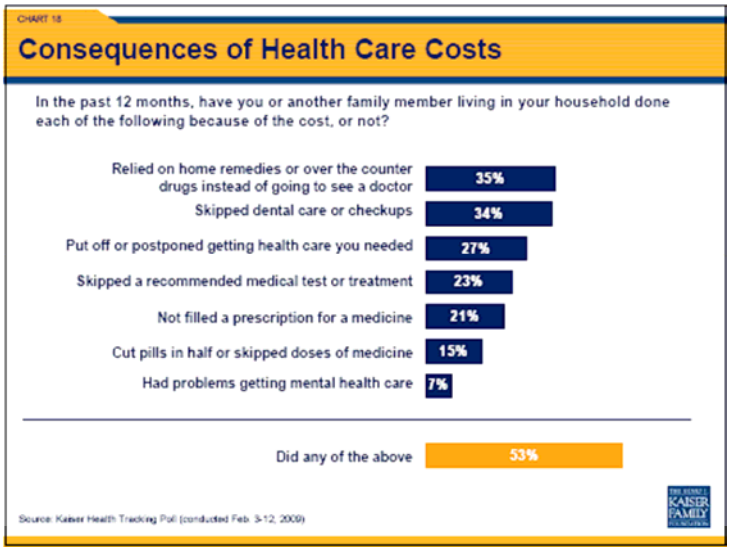
NCDS is a family business and we understand the importance of everyone in your life outside of work. Make sure to make time for your loved ones.

Kaiser Health Tracking Poll

Kaiser Family Foundation – February 2009

The first Kaiser Health Tracking Poll of 2009 finds the public is increasingly worried about the affordability and availability of care, with many postponing or skipping treatments due to cost in the past year and a notable minority forced into serious financial straits due to medical bills.

The February Kaiser Health Tracking Poll, the first in a series designed and analyzed by the Foundation's public opinion survey research team, examines voters' specific health care issue interests and experiences and perceptions about health care reform.



Stimulus Bill Rewards Docs Using Tech

Physicians who adopt and use a certified EMR in a meaningful way by 2011 will receive up to $44,000 per MD in incentives over five years. For most physicians, there will not be direct grants to purchase an EMR. The "reward" will come via incentive payments. The government is hopeful that for some practices the incentives could potentially be more than the actual cost of purchasing and implementing the EMR system. Physicians not using an EMR will face penalties beginning in 2015. KARENZUPKO & ASSOCIATES, INC.

NCDS is capable of interfacing our billing software with any certified EMR and can assist you with your search for the system that best fits your needs. Contact Dave or Mick Polo for more details.

Please tell your friends and colleagues about our professional billings services. Your referrals are the best advertising for NCDS and greatly appreciated. Thank you!