



Special Alert

November 20, 2001

Since AAHomecare will be closed on Friday, November 23, our newsletter will not issue this week. AAHomecare wants to ensure our members are abreast of the latest news affecting the homecare industry. AAHomecare will provide further details on these stories in the November 30 newsletter edition.

House Bill Would Delay HIPAA Enactment

On November 16, after several weeks of negotiation, an administrative simplification bill, with broad bipartisan support, was drafted in the House. The bill would extend the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) deadline for compliance of the electronic transactions and code sets regulation for one year (to October 16, 2003) but would not delay the privacy regulations, which are scheduled to be implemented April 2003. The bill is sponsored by Reps. David Hobson (R-OH) and Thomas Sawyer (D-OH). Also co-sponsoring the legislation are Reps. Bill Thomas (R-CA), Charles Rangel (D-NY), Nancy Johnson (R-CT), and Pete Stark (D-CA), who had all previously opposed any delay in administrative simplification compliance.

The bill would require covered entities to file a compliance plan by the original date (October 16, 2002) that would explain their plan for meeting the new deadline. If an entity fails to file a plan, it would be excluded from participation in Medicare. There is also an administrative fee for filing paper claims for Medicare reimbursement after October 16, 2003 – \$1 for each paper claim filed.

President Bush Declares November “National COPD Awareness Month”

With bipartisan support from members of Congress and leading patient and health organizations, the White House has proclaimed November “National COPD Awareness Month.” The goal is to help raise awareness of a disease that claims more than 100,000 lives per year.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which can be stabilized but not cured, includes a number of chronic respiratory diseases such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma.

"We are pleased that COPD is being recognized as a major public health issue by both the medical community and our federal government," stated Cliff Stearns (R-FL), chief congressional sponsor of National COPD Awareness Month. "I am proud to support this effort, and sincerely believe that it will further strengthen our commitment, which is to help people affected by this serious and under-diagnosed disease be familiar with the symptoms, talk to their doctor, and seek effective treatments."

AAHomecare's President and CEO Tom Connaughton sees this as another way to present the homecare industry in a positive light commenting, "This recognition of COPD by policymakers underscores the importance of the work of many AAHomecare members who are deeply involved in treating patients afflicted by COPD."

Senate Finance Committee Working on Medicare Reform Bill

The Senate Finance Committee is currently working on its version of a Medicare reform bill that is very similar to a bill introduced in October by the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

One major difference that would set the Senate version apart from the House version is that the bill contains language making the collection of OASIS data from non-Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries optional, "pending a study by CMS on the application of OASIS."

The language specifically states: "This provision requires the Secretary to provide Congress with a recommendation for changing the current requirement for home health agencies to collect Outcome and Assessment Information Set (OASIS) data for their patients who are not eligible for Medicare no later than 18 months after the bill's enactment. During the interim period, the current requirement to collect OASIS data is optional for non-Medicare patients until six months after CMS submits its recommendation to Congress. A state may continue to require the collection of this data for non-Medicare patients during this interim delay for home health agencies operating within the state."

The bill will be co-sponsored by Senate members John Kerry (D-MA), Frank Murkowski (R-AK), Max Baucus (D-MT), Charles Grassley (R-IA), and Russ Feingold (D-WI).

HHS to Launch Quality Initiative for Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiaries

On November 19, HHS Secretary Thompson announced an initiative to provide Medicare and Medicaid recipients with better comparative information to help them choose nursing homes, hospitals, and other sources of health care.

Over the next several years, CMS will work to develop and publish similar, meaningful consumer information for home health agencies, and eventually hospitals and other types of providers. This information will give beneficiaries, their families, and their physicians the information they need to make informed choices of their providers.

Beginning in January 2002, CMS will begin a five-state demonstration to identify, collect, and publish nursing home quality information in Colorado, Maryland, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington. The national project is scheduled to begin in October 2002. The quality measures identified will be recognized and accepted by consumers, clinicians, and health care providers.

CMS Administrator Tom Scully also announced that CMS and the National Quality Forum (NQF), a voluntary, standard-setting organization representing public and private purchasers, consumers, providers, and researchers, will conduct hearings across the nation to solicit advice and comments from consumers, advocacy groups, health care purchasers, payers, providers and others that are interested in this and other programs in national quality initiative.

HIPAA Homecare Action Items Teleconference

Join AAHomecare on Thursday, December 6, from 12 pm - 1:30 pm (EST) for the Homecare Education Institute's 90-minute teleconference on *HIPAA Homecare Action Items*. The teleconference will familiarize homecare providers with the compliance requirements of the Healthcare Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). This program will review the three major components of HIPAA – claims coding and processing, patient access to healthcare information, and medical information privacy and security. Practical action steps and staff training requirements will be reviewed. Business form modifications, paper and computer system changes, and policy and procedure additions will be presented.

Speakers will include David Pfeil, Arrow Professional Enterprises; Randy Schluter, Arrow Professional Enterprises; and Cara Bachenheimer, Epstein Becker & Green

To participate, register by Monday, December 3.

Sleep-Disordered Breathing Teleconference Series

The third of a five-part series of teleconferences on sleep-disordered breathing will be held on December 6, from 1:00 - 2:30 pm (EST). Presented by industry consultant Jeanie Lane, the teleconference entitled *Billing for Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) Therapy* will discuss billing and coding for PAP therapy and accessories; costs vs. reimbursement; assigned vs. non-assigned; monitoring accounts receivables; education of managed care and other third party payers; and implications for billing memory units.

Registration forms for all teleconference are available online at <http://www.aahomecare.org/meetings/teleconferences.htm> or by contacting Kim Kianka-Roberti at 703-535-1887.