

MedPAC Proposes 2012 Medicare Update

Unless Congress intervenes, Medicare actuaries now predict that Medicare payments to physicians will fall by 29.5% in 2012. The projection is contained in a recent letter to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC). The Commission is recommending that Congress avert such draconian cuts (as it did five times in 2010 alone) and act instead to increase payments for physician services by 1% in 2012.

In a report released March 15, the Commission noted that although a permanent fix to the sustainable growth

rate (SGR) formula carries a very high price, the "mounting frustration in the provider community stemming from the uncertainty of future Medicare payments, with looming payment cuts in the balance" is not without its own unacceptably high cost. The report suggests that MedPAC will explore alternatives to the SGR and consider additional "levers for enhancing beneficiaries' access to high-quality primary care."

The MedPAC report notes that between 2006 and 2011 payments for primary care services increased

by 22.5%, but more changes are necessary. Such changes could include "an expansion of nurses' scope of practice in primary care" and reimbursement for "patient-clinician communication [by phone or email] when it avoids the need for office visits."

The AMA has worked to educate Commissioners regarding the destructiveness of the multiple, temporary SGR fixes of the past ten years and the urgent need for a permanent solution.

The full report is available on MedPAC's web site at: <http://www.medpac.gov/>. ♦



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