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CMS drops final 2021 Physician Fee Schedule that includes ‘deeply troubling’ cuts to radiologists’ pay



Marty Stempniak

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services dropped its hotly anticipated final Physician Fee Schedule on Tuesday that includes significant compensation cuts for radiologists and other specialties.

Provider advocacy groups such as the Medical Group Management Association said they appreciated the rule’s pay bump for primary care and others that bill for office-based services. However, a 10% decrease to the conversion factor and resulting reimbursement reductions in specialty services are “deeply troubling during a time when COVID-19 cases are skyrocketing and practices are scrambling to stay financially viable,” said Anders Gilberg, MGMA’s senior VP of government affairs.

Others, such as the American College of Radiology, are intensifying their push for congressional action to counteract the payment punch.

“COVID-19 was a crisis we couldn’t avoid that changed our lives in ways we couldn’t ignore. The coming cuts to Medicare are different: They represent an entirely avoidable, preventable mess imposed in the midst of a once-in-a-generation pandemic,” Bob Still, executive director of the Radiology Business Management Association said Tuesday, adding that “CMS seems to have ignored the thousands of comments opposing this policy.”

Both RBMA and ACR are part of a coalition of 74 organizations representing more than 1 million physicians and other providers across the U.S. They’re urging lawmakers to pass the “Holding Providers Harmless from Medicare Cuts During COVID-19 Act,” which would grant docs with temporary additional payments for the next two years to make up for such decreases.

Some have predicted widespread delays and care rationing if Congress moves forward with budget-neutrality requirements to offset a corresponding pay hike for evaluation and management services.

“These cuts will be devastating to an already struggling healthcare system and may lead to reduced access to care for older Americans and Americans with disabilities,” the ACR said in a statement shared Tuesday night. “If Congress fails to mitigate these cuts, decreases in Medicare payments will further exacerbate the problems occurring across the country with practices and

institution-based providers furloughing or cutting staff and an increasing number closing their doors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

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