

OIG Finds Enteral Overpayment

Medicare ENT Reimbursement Doubles Supplier Costs

Medicare's fee schedule for enteral nutrients provided under Part B during non-Part A stays was more than double the prices available to nursing facilities and other purchasers in 2006, according to a new report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG).

Enteral nutrients are delivered directly to a person's digestive tract through a feeding tube inserted through the nose or placed in the small intestine of the stomach.

OIG detailed the overpayment issue in a report titled, "Medicare Part B Services During Non-Part A Nursing Home Stays: Enteral Nutrient Pricing." Examiners discovered that the Medicare fee schedule amount of \$0.67 exceeded the average unit price available for suppliers responding to the OIG survey by \$0.35 for B4150 nutrients.

For B4154 nutrients, the fee schedule amount of \$1.22 topped the average unit price by \$0.66.

OIG used the calculated average unit

prices available from suppliers to then estimate that Medicare's allowance for these two most frequently billed enteral nutrient codes exceeded supplier prices by some \$61 million for non-Part A nursing facility stays in 2006. Specifically, fee schedule amounts eclipsed the median unit prices available to long term care entities by 52 percent for B4150 nutrients and 54 percent for B4154 nutrients.

B4150 and B4154 were used by OIG because the two reimbursement codes accounted for nearly all of the \$142 million allowed for enteral nutrients provided during non-Part A stays in 2006.

To remedy the problem, OIG recommended that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) adjust the Medicare fee schedule amount for enteral nutrients to more accurately reflect supplier prices.

"CMS can use inherent reasonableness reviews or may be able to act on available pricing information from other sources," OIG said in its report.

Payments could be further impacted if Congress changed the prosthetic device benefit to restrict Part B coverage to a beneficiary's home and recognized enteral nutrients as food covered under nursing facility room and board payment. "Such a policy change would end Part B payments for enteral nutrition therapy [ENT] costs in nursing homes and would affect nearly half of all current Part B ENT payments annually," OIG said.

The reason for such a change is that enteral nutrient feeding costs may be comparable to conventional meal costs incurred for other nursing facility residents, and these conventional costs are reimbursed under room and board payments.

—Patrick Connoles

Culture Change Webinars Explore Outdoors

A new three-part webinar series sponsored by the Pioneer Network will examine outdoor environmental design and green initiatives that benefit older adults. The "Creating Home—Access to Nature Webinar Series,"

Access to Nature for Older Adults, includes a set of three educational videos that translate evidence-based principles into applicable design solutions for residential settings for older adults.

"There's a lot of research that shows spending time outside can have major health benefits for older people," Rodiek said.

"If a resident goes outdoors for even five or 10 minutes a day, it can greatly benefit health, mood, sleeping patterns, hormone balance, and vitamin D absorption."

In addition to providing "cost-effective guidelines for creating outdoor spaces seniors will use," the webinars will look at research findings in gerontology, psychology, design, and resident input.

"Unfortunately, the physical environment is not typically designed to support residents' desire to go outdoors," Rodiek said, and "the problems may be easy and inexpensive to fix, but often they are not recognized by staff and administrators."

—Meg LaPorte



scheduled for March 2, 9, and 16, is aimed at nursing facility, assisted living, and independent living professionals.

The series is based on an award-winning research project by Susan Rodiek, a professor in Health Facilities Design in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University. According to the Pioneer Network, Rodiek's project, titled