



Health Care Quality Watch

MONTHLY NEWS BRIEFS FOR MANAGERS AND OPINION LEADERS

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IPRO has been chosen by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to perform reconsiderations, or second level claims appeals, of denied Medicare fee-for-service claims. Designated as a Qualified Independent Contractor (QIC), IPRO is one of only eight organizations across the U.S. now eligible to bid on this work. The initiative, recently announced by CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD, is a key step in helping Medicare beneficiaries resolve their appeals more quickly and efficiently, as part of a comprehensive overhaul of the Medicare claims appeals system. The reconsiderations that will be conducted by the QICs will replace the current “fair hearing” process for Medicare Part B claims and establish a new second level of appeal for Medicare Part A claims. Statute requires that reconsiderations be completed within 60 days from the day the request is filed.

IPRO is sponsoring performance data educational sessions this winter for hospital public relations executives. The two half-day events, scheduled for January 6, 2005 at the Desmond Hotel in Albany and January 12, 2005 at the Southgate Hotel in Manhattan, will review the hospital-specific performance information that is scheduled to be posted to www.Medicare.gov next February. Findings address the management of acute myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure and community-acquired pneumonia and are derived from

medical record abstractions conducted by hospitals themselves. Hospital public relations executives who would like to register for either of these free events should call Claudette Steele at IPRO at 516-326-7767, ext. 588. For more information regarding CMS's forthcoming hospital data release, visit www.cms.gov and click on the “Quality Initiatives” button on the home page.

Due to the heavy volume of registrations for IPRO's 20th Anniversary Health Policy conference, to be held Tuesday, November 30, 2004 in New York City, IPRO is offering simultaneous Web streaming of the event. Ian Morrison, PhD and Bruce Vladeck, PhD will headline the conference, to be held at the New York Marriott Marquis Hotel. Morrison, an internationally recognized consultant and futurist, is the author of *Healthcare in the New Millennium: Vision, Values and Leadership* and a Senior Fellow at the Institute for the Future. Vladeck, formerly Administrator of the U.S. Health Care Financing Administration, is the author of the critically acclaimed *Unloving Care: The Nursing Home Tragedy*. He is currently Professor of Health Policy and Geriatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. To participate via simultaneous broadcast on IPRO's Web site, please register at www.ipro.org or contact Claudette Steele at 516-326-7767, ext. 588.

IPRO is now seeking nominations to a statewide taskforce that will support the forthcoming *Remaking American Medicine* television series, scheduled to air on public television in 2006. The four-part, primetime television series is being produced by Crosskeys Media, an award-winning, California-based documentary film-making team. It will address leading-edge quality initiatives described by the producers as “...campaigns that reduce harm, increase the effectiveness of medical care, promote the self-management of chronic disease and ultimately save lives.” A National Partnership Program has been developed that includes leading health care advocacy organizations from across the nation. At the local level, each Medicare-funded Quality Improvement Organization like IPRO has been asked by CMS to promote the series to local constituent groups. For more information regarding the IPRO-led New York Taskforce now in formation, contact Sheila McCullagh, IPRO's Director of Consumer Protection & Outreach at 516-326-7767, ext. 217.

Important information for clinicians from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding influenza antiviral medications can now be accessed via the IPRO Web site. The 2004-2005 *Interim Chemoprophylaxis and Treatment Guidelines* issued October 18, 2004 address the appropriate use of influenza

antiviral medications following institutional outbreaks, as well as instances when medications can be considered for individuals at high risk of serious complications from the flu who are not able to get vaccinated. These and other CDC materials are available at www.cdc.gov/flu or by calling the National Immunization Hotline at 800-232-2522. The CDC material can also be accessed via the "Professional Homepage" of www.ipro.org.

Medicare beneficiaries suffering from multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis and several types of cancer can join a demonstration project that subsidizes the cost of drugs taken at home, rather than in physicians' offices. Under the \$500 million Medicare Replacement Drug Demonstration that runs through the end of 2005, Medicare-dependent individuals with serious and life-threatening illnesses can receive substantial subsidies for medications that replace those that previously were only reimbursed when provided in physicians' offices. The demonstration

is limited to a maximum of 50,000 enrollees. Once the demonstration is over, beneficiaries will receive coverage for these medications under the Medicare Part D drug benefit that becomes available in 2006. For enrollment information and demonstration applications, contact www.cms.hhs.gov/researchers/demos/drugcoverage/demo.asp.

IPRO has joined with the National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP), the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the American College of Cardiology (ACC) to urge the 17 million people with diabetes to manage their blood pressure and cholesterol, along with their blood glucose (blood sugar) — an approach that helps prevent the leading killers of people with diabetes: heart attack and stroke.

The groups are joining forces to inform people with diabetes that good diabetes management is more than lowering blood glucose; managing blood pressure and cholesterol is also crucial. New studies show a strong link between diabetes and heart

disease, yet most people with diabetes are unaware of their very high risk of cardiovascular disease.

IPRO and its partners are urging people with diabetes to focus on three numbers: blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol. People with diabetes should ask their doctors or other health care providers three important questions:

- What are my blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol numbers?
- What should my target numbers be?
- What do I need to do to reach and maintain my target numbers?

Terry Mahotiere, MD, MPH, the Medical Officer who directs the IPRO Quality Improvement project addressing health care disparities among African American Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes in New York City, makes an additional point: "Diabetes is not an equal opportunity disease. Blacks have higher rates of diabetes and are more likely to get heart disease and stroke. If you are black, live in New York City and are a senior, you are also less likely to receive some important tests to protect your health against the effects of this serious illness. Now is the time to find out if you're at risk for heart disease and stroke."

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Health Care Quality Watch is produced by IPRO's Department of Communications & Corporate Development. IPRO is a not-for-profit organization that works with public and private sector clients to analyze and improve the quality of health care.

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