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Advocates Push To Make Sure E-Prescriptions Are Filled
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Big businesses, unions, consumer groups and pharmaceutical stakeholders are not taking any chances that a proposal to tie physicians' adoption of electronic prescribing technology to Medicare reimbursement will slip through the cracks as the Senate crafts its Medicare package to stop a looming physician pay cut.

The groups wrote Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus and ranking member Charles Grassley Thursday as well as leaders of the House Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce committees pressing them to pass e-prescribing requirements.

"In addition to the beneficial safety aspects of electronic prescribing, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has estimated that there would be increased administrative efficiencies for physician offices and pharmacies, as well as significant cost savings for patients and payers through access to lower-cost brand and generic medications," they wrote.

The more than 40 co-signers on the letter include AT&T, General Motors, UPS, CVS Caremark, BlueCross BlueShield Association, AFL-CIO and Consumers Union, all led by the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association, the trade group for pharmacy benefit managers.

"We're in the red zone, but we can't afford to be complacent," Pharmaceutical Care Management Association spokesman Charles Cote said.

Baucus wants to take another stab at including an e-prescribing requirement in the current pay cut patch the Finance Committee is crafting, an aide said, but no final decisions have been made. PCMA and the other groups want to assure e-prescribing doesn't slip like it did last year.

The e-prescribing bill the groups are pushing, dubbed E-Meds, is potentially a \$3 billion saver. The bill would reward physicians with a bonus for each electronically prescribed medication and cut back on reimbursement for those that forego the technology. Marrying e-prescribing and Medicare reimbursement has support on both sides of the aisle and the backing of the administration.

But e-prescribing requirements were dropped late in the process last year as senators slimmed down a package to delay the 10 percent physician cut for six months. They are considering an 18-month delay currently that would cost \$8 billion over five years.

In addition to the letter, PCMA kicked off a rather grim television, print and online ad campaign Wednesday featuring a grieving woman at a gravesite to draw attention to the 7,000 people the Institute of Medicine determined die each year as a result of medication errors. The institute says 1.5 million medication errors could be avoided annually through e-prescribing.

by Anna Edney

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