



Medicare Drug Watch

April 30, 2008

PBM Lobby Launches Campaign For E-Prescribing Mandate in Medicare

A trade group for pharmacy benefit managers has launched a new national ad campaign aimed at bolstering efforts in Congress to mandate electronic prescribing in Medicare

Pharmaceutical Care Management Association President and Chief Executive Officer Mark Merritt said April 29 that he is confident the measure will make it into Medicare legislation this year, and that the estimated \$3 billion in savings over 10 years that e-prescribing could produce for Medicare would be an offset to Medicare physician payment increases being considered by lawmakers.

He also said the cost savings could go toward paying e-prescribing startup costs for physicians.

Speaking to reporters at a launch of the ad campaign, Merritt said Medicare standards for e-prescribing already exist and that the move would be a gateway to broader health information technology reform.

"It's the only part of health IT that is ready," Merritt added.

PCMA's campaign, he said, is focused on patient safety and improving quality in prescribing at a time when the debate over an e-prescribing mandate in Medicare is mired in concerns about how doctors would pay for the new technology.

"We don't want to minimize provider needs," Merritt said of concerns that physicians are unable to afford or unwilling to pay the startup costs. However, he said, patient safety should be a greater concern.

Merritt said he hopes the new campaign will create "urgency" for an e-prescribing measure in the physician pay update being considered currently in the Senate. The payment fix for doctors would replace the 10.6 percent cut in Medicare reimbursements scheduled to take effect July 1.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said earlier in April that he was seeking to include an e-prescribing provision in the legislation to fix the Medicare payments to physicians. In December 2007, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) led a bipartisan effort to introduce the Medicare Electronic Medication and Safety Protection Act of 2007 (S. 2408, HR. 4296), which called for a Medicare mandate for e-prescribing as well as financial incentives to help doctors pay the startup costs for e-prescribing. The bill also called for payments cuts of as much as 10 percent to physicians who failed to adopt e-prescribing by 2011.

Merritt said there is no active opposition to the bill and that complacency on e-prescribing "is the real enemy here."

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