



DAILY NEWS

NHIA To Congress: Fix 21st Century Cures' Coverage Gap For Part B Home Infusion

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The National Home Infusion Association (NHIA) and more 170 physicians and physician groups, patient advocacy groups, hospitals and medical associations asked congressional leaders to quickly change provisions of the 21st Century Cures Act that they say created a reimbursement gap for Medicare Part B durable medical equipment drugs for vulnerable patients with home infusion therapy. The Cures law put in place an average sales price pay formula for Part B DME infusion drugs starting this month, but the law delayed until January of 2021 a payment system for home services associated with the infusions.

Kendall Van Pool, NHIA's vice president of legislative affairs, said NHIA and other groups that signed the letter are fighting to move the services' reimbursement structure timeline up from 2021 and to push back the new average sales price formula.

The groups wrote to lawmakers that any change in Part B DME drug reimbursement should be implemented simultaneously with payment for home infusion services. "We request that Congress move early in 2017 to ALIGN the effective dates of ASP reimbursement for Part B DME infusion drugs and the infusion services payment (Section 5004(a) and Section 5012 of The 21st Century Cures Act)," the letter states.

Nursing and other services account for about half of the total therapy costs, Van Pool said. Because CMS still needs to figure out the rebate structure for those services through its lengthy rulemaking process, Congress postponed the implementation for those payments until 2021. But lawmakers were eager to implement the new payment structure for the drugs in the Cures Act so they would start achieving savings in 2017, Van Pool said.

"The further you get away from the market dynamic, the less the actual market applies to those drugs," Van Pool said. "Changing the reimbursement structure to the average sales price changes the drugs to 2016 prices."

In their Jan. 26 letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY), House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (CA), NHIA said the coverage gap is an "unintended consequence" that "puts vulnerable patients at risk of losing life-saving home infusion therapy."

The gap means a hard hit to the most-fragile patients, Van Pool said, noting those with heart failure who require inotropic therapy and people with auto-immune diseases who need subcutaneous immunoglobulin therapy are most affected. NHIA pointed out in its letter that home infusion is a cheaper and more efficient way of delivering care to those patients as it comes "without increased costs, infection risks, hospitalizations and hospital readmissions."

"This would be a step back from the stated goals of Congress to provide low cost, high quality care in the Medicare program," the group said in its letter.

Provider and advocacy groups concerned about the change formed a coalition called Keep Infusion Care At Home to lobby Congress to change the provision. Paul Mastrapa, CEO of Option Care, one of the founding members of the coalition, said it is important for Congress to align the dates for implementing the new drug and services reimbursements for these beneficiaries. -- *Susannah Luthi* (sluthi@iwpnews.com)

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