

Physician Update

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Outpatient Therapy Clinics Continue to Face Medicare Cap

January of 2003 marked the end of the two year moratorium on the \$1500 cap affecting Medicare part B outpatient services. Because congress did not permanently repeal this cap, patients and health care providers must continue to face limitations in the services covered by Medicare in outpatient therapy clinics. For example, stroke victims who rely solely on outpatient care for physical therapy and speech therapy may be forced to choose between the two because Medicare simply does not provide enough coverage for both. **Is there an alternative that more completely encompasses all of the Medicare patient's needs?**



Fortunately, for many patients and their physicians the answer is, **YES!** Home health care enables *qualified* patients to receive therapies, skilled nursing procedures, and social services in their own homes under the coordination of their physicians and a single agency. Because home care is covered under Medicare part A, it is not subject to the \$1500 cap. In fact, many are surprised to learn that there is no limit to the duration of Medicare coverage for patients who qualify for home care. As long as it is reasonable and beneficial, patients are able to receive services geared toward reaching their optimal level of health. This, after all, is the goal that every physician strives to actualize for his or her patients.

Sigma's Benchmarks

Category	Sigma	National
Average patients' age	77.13	75.20
Medicare patients	99.43%	92.87%
Patients lives alone	31.63%	28.48%
Good rehab prognosis	91.19%***	74.31%
Recovery prognosis	96.72%***	89.62%
Patients with rehab needs	34.33%	27.29%
Cardiac and PVD patients	35.60%	32.57%
Diabetic patients	13.05%	10.07%
Fractures	10.50%	8.80%

This data represent categories provided by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid, CASPER© report.

Together Rx for Seniors

Eight major US drug companies have jointly established a discount prescription drug card for seniors. To be eligible, an applicant must be a Medicare enrollee, have an annual income of less than \$28,000 for individuals and \$38000 for couples and not have prescription drug coverage. Saving range from approximately 20-40% on drug covered by the program. For information and applications, go to the program website at

www.together-rx.com

or call 1-800-865-7211

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On the Home Health Horizon...

As part of our continuing efforts to provide the highest possible caliber of homecare, Sigma is pleased to announce the establishment of an extensive, 6 week home health education program for nurses. This program, which is designed for recent nursing school graduates as well as veteran nurses without prior home health experience, will provide an in depth education on all aspect of homecare. All students will receive a \$1000 stipend upon completion. Space is limited. Please call for more information.

Homebound status, the new interpretation

Chronically disabled, homebound Medicare beneficiaries received good news late last year when Medicare took action to allow increased flexibility in determining homebound status. The new language in the program manual for home health providers:

1. makes it clear that the determination of a patient's homebound status is one that must be made over a period of time, not on a daily or weekly basis, so that infrequent, special trips outside the home do not disqualify a patient who otherwise qualifies for home care,
2. expands the list of examples used to illustrate occasional absences from the home to include but not be limited to infrequent and special occasions such as: family reunions, graduations, or funerals, and
3. adds the late stages of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease) and other neurodegenerative disabilities to the list of examples of conditions that may indicate that a patient cannot leave his or her home.

These new instructions make it more feasible for doctors and home health agencies to provide their patients with the best care possible; and, most importantly, they permit the chronically disabled patient who is receiving home care to enjoy the fullest life possible.

--Eye on Home Care, Special Release, Sigma Health Care, Inc. ©, August 2002

Sigma's Anti-coagulation Monitoring Program

Recognition of the special needs for bedside coagulation testing for patients on Coumadin® has driven Sigma to establish a special coagulation management program for home health patients.

Our professional staff is licensed and certified by the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, the Nation Certification Agency for Clinical Laboratory Scientists, CLIA, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Among the advantages of providing coagulation monitoring in the patient's home is increased patient compliance with prescribed therapy. Additionally, because results are reported immediately from the home to the physician, the time lapse between testing and adjustment of medication level is eliminated. The result is a decreased risk of heart attack or internal bleeding for patients on anti-coagulation therapy.

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