



Care that Feels Right at Home

Press Release

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Medicare's New Rules for Oxygen Therapy Are Alarming, Says the American Association for Homecare

ARLINGTON, VA, October 31, 2008 ----- Medicare's new regulations for providing home oxygen therapy to seniors are alarming and wholly inadequate, according to the American Association for Homecare. The Association expects that approximately one-third of all patients who rely on the Medicare home oxygen benefit will be affected by the new rules, which address the 36-month cap on home oxygen payments.

"Once again, CMS has discounted the important role that homecare providers play in the provision of care to Medicare patients on home oxygen therapy," said Tyler J. Wilson, president and CEO of the American Association for Homecare. "The guidance published by Medicare focuses primarily on the oxygen equipment and does not account for the required range of services and the realities of providing quality oxygen therapy to Medicare beneficiaries who suffer from COPD and other lung diseases. We fear that this approach will jeopardize seniors' access to the level of care they require and have come to expect from their oxygen providers."

Yesterday, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced new oxygen payment rules and responsibilities that are mandated by the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA). The changes were included as part of the final rule for the 2009 physician fee schedule.

Specifically, the American Association for Homecare is alarmed about:

- The requirement that oxygen providers must arrange continued care for patients who move out of a provider's service area;
- The treatment of routine maintenance and service of the oxygen system to ensure that it is working at optimal performance levels;
- No recognition of costs associated with visiting patients who require episodes of unscheduled emergency services; and
- No payment for oxygen supplies required to keep the patient healthy and keep the equipment working properly once the 36-month cap on oxygen becomes effective.

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“The rules released by CMS yesterday underscore the fact that the current Medicare oxygen policy is seriously flawed and changes are needed in order to make the oxygen benefit more focused on patients and the services they require,” Wilson noted.

The American Association for Homecare represents durable medical equipment providers, manufacturers, and other organizations in the homecare community. Members serve the medical needs of millions of Americans who require oxygen equipment and therapy, mobility assistive technologies, medical supplies, inhalation drug therapy, home infusion, and other medical equipment and services in their homes. The Association’s members operate more than 3,000 homecare locations in all 50 states. Visit www.aahomecare.org.