

Hill Day Talking Points: Members Make Their Voices Heard on HIM Issues

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by Wendy Mangin, MS, RHIA

In early April, 170 HIM professionals gathered in Washington, DC, for AHIMA's annual Capitol Hill Day, a wonderful opportunity to interact with elected officials and discuss key legislative issues.

For those who did not have the opportunity to participate this year, here are salient talking points on three key issues used in conversations that day.

Reviewing the RAC Program

Members advocated for passage of the Medicare Recovery Audit Contractor Program Moratorium Act (HR 4105). The bill would impose a one-year moratorium on the use of recovery audit contractors (RACs) under the Medicare Integrity Program. It would also require the CMS administrator to evaluate the program for Congress and the comptroller general to report to Congress on the use of RACs.

The bill was introduced due to problems in the Medicare RAC pilots in California, Florida, and New York. These problems have not been resolved despite complaints from these three states and the industry. Medicare plans to expand the RAC program to more states in the coming year.

Without resolving the current problems, healthcare providers will suffer significant costs due to the current RAC program and the Medicare program itself. There are currently 51 cosponsors to the bill in the House, but no action has been taken on it yet.

ICD-10, ASAP

Members requested that any health IT or Medicare legislation sent to the president include language providing for the adoption of ICD-10-CM and ICD-10-PCS by October 1, 2011. ICD-9-CM has been in use for 30 years and no longer satisfactorily meets the needs for any of its purposes, including healthcare reimbursement, quality measurement, and public health reporting.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services are now taking steps for CMS to adopt ICD-10, but HIPAA restrictions could draw out the process over four to six years. Although CMS has promised a notice of proposed rule making for such a change, it has yet to be delivered.

Genetic Nondiscrimination Legislation

Hill Day participants also requested support for moving the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (S 358) to the Senate floor and then to the president. The bill bars health insurance companies from using genetic information to set premiums or determine enrollment eligibility. Similarly, employers could not use genetic information in hiring, firing, or promotion decisions.

More than 1,100 genetic tests are available today, but they are useless if fear of discrimination discourages people from taking them or participating in clinical trials. Genetic testing could lead to early, life-saving therapy for a wide range of diseases that have hereditary links, such as breast and prostate cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and Parkinson's disease.

Within a month of our members being on the Hill, the Senate passed the bill and the president signed it into law. I would like to thank our members, along with our Washington, DC, staff, for their tireless advocacy on behalf of this legislation.

I encourage each of you to participate in Hill Day next spring. It provides a wonderful opportunity for you, as a constituent, to discuss the issues most important to our profession. You can also meet with your representatives in their local offices. Our combined voices really can make a difference.

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