

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
Ambulance
Open Door Forum
Moderator: Jill Darling
June 15, 2017
2:00 p.m. ET

OPERATOR: Good afternoon. My name is (Megan) and I will be your conference facilitator today. At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Ambulance Open Door Forum.

All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. After the speakers' remarks, there will be a question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star and one on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, please press the pound key. Thank you.

Jill Darling, you may begin your conference.

Jill Darling: Thanks, (Megan). Good morning and good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us for the first of Ambulance Open Door Forum of 2017. I'm Jill Darling in the CMS Office of Communications.

Before we get into the agenda, I have a brief announcement. This Open Door Forum is not intended for the press and the remarks are not considered on the record. If you are a member of the press, you may listen in but please refrain from asking questions during the Q&A portion of the call. If you have inquiries, please contact CMS at press@cms.hhs.gov.

So now we'll get into our only topic for today. It will be given by Amy Gruber, which is the sunset of temporary add-on payments for urban, rural, and super rural ground ambulance services.

Amy Gruber: Thank you, Jill. I'm Amy Gruber and I work in the Center for Medicare, Hospital and Ambulatory Policy Group, Division of Ambulatory Services. My division is responsible for Medicare Part B Ambulance Payment Policy. I have one announcement that I'm sure most of the ambulance providers and suppliers are aware of, and that is the expiration of the temporary add-on payment provisions.

The temporary – the three temporary add-on payments have been extended several times. Most recently, the citation is Section 203(a) and (b) of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) of 2015, which includes a 3 percent increase to the base and mileage rate for ground ambulance transports that originate in rural areas, a 2 percent increase to the base and mileage rate for ground ambulance transports that originate in urban areas, and a 22.6 percent increase in the base rate for ground ambulance transports that originate in super rural areas. The three temporary add-on payments are effective through December 31st, 2017.

Thank you, Jill.

Jill Darling: All right. Thanks, Amy. So if anyone has questions, please queue up. And, (Megan), we'll go into our Q&A, please.

Operator: Certainly. As a reminder, ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to ask a question, please press star then the number on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, please press the pound key. Please limit yourself to one question and one follow-up to allow other participants time for questions. If you require any further follow-up, you may press star one again to rejoin the queue. Again, that is star then the number if you have a question. And we have no question at this time.

Our first question is from Carolyn Henson with National Government. Your line is open.

Carolyn, your line is open.

Our next question is from Jenelle Hurd from Ambulance Services. Your line is open.

Jenelle Hurd: Yes, good afternoon. Was just wondering the likelihood of the increase being extended beyond December 31st of 2017?

Hello?

Amy Gruber: Hi, this is Amy. The extension beyond December 31st, 2017 would require legislative action. It has been extended several times in the past. But when once again it would require legislative action for it extend beyond December 31st, 2017.

Jenelle Hurd: And is there anything, any legislation that's pending in regards to this?

Amy Gruber: I'm not aware of any at this time.

Jenelle Hurd: Thank you.

Operator: Your next question is from Carolyn Henson with National Government. Your line is open.

Carolyn Henson: Thank you. My question is about the nationwide expansion of the repetitive non-emergent ambulance trips. Is there any new news on that?

Amy Gruber: Hi, this is Amy. Are you referring to the prior auth?

Carolyn Henson: Yes, I am referring to the prior auth. I'm sorry.

Amy Gruber: That's OK. Unfortunately, I don't believe our representatives from that component are available for this conference call. But if you'd like, you can send me an e-mail and I can, you know, forward your question to the appropriate folks over in the Prior Authorization. My e-mail is – it's Amy Gruber, and that's amy.gruber@cms.hhs.gov.

Carolyn Henson: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Amy Gruber: You're welcome.

Operator: Again, if you like to ask a question, please press star and number the one on your telephone keypad.

Your next question is from (Wendy Jamarillo) with (Complete Billing Solutions).

(Wendy Jamarillo): Yes. I had a question on the super rural rates how that is paid out by Medicare?

Amy Gruber: Hi, this is Amy. The super rural rate is 22.6 percent increase in the base rate for ground ambulance transports that originate in the super rural areas. And those – it's a defined – I don't have the specific description of that with me. But it's a defined subset area in the rural population. If you have access for Ambulance Fee Schedule website, there is a listing of the – each of the codes because as you know payment is based on the point of pickup of the ambulance. And on our website, we have the listing of ZIP codes and their designations.

And so, if you like – I don't have that link or website with me, but if you'd like, if could send me an e-mail, I can provide you that link, and it'll identify each ZIP code, what their designation is. And on that file, we've identified those ZIP codes that are urban, those that are rural, and those that are super rural. So, once again, if you want to shoot me an e-mail, my e-mail address is Amy Gruber, amy.gruber@cms.hhs.gov.

(Wendy Jamarillo): OK. So it's amy.gruber@cms ...

Amy Gruber: ..hhs.-gov, G-O-V.

(Wendy Jamarillo): Thank you.

Operator: Your next question comes from Helen Rosso with Priority Med Transport. Your line is open.

Helen Rosso: Yes, on that – on the rural, the super rural that you were just talking about those that increase, we're a new ambulance company and we're just – how do you input that into your billing software? Do you just upload it in there? I found the link and all the information on your website. I'm just not sure how to implement that.

Amy Gruber: We would suggest that you contact your MACs, your local MAC, for additional help with that.

Helen Rosso: The local MAC? I'm sorry, I'm not following.

Amy Gruber: Your local Medicare Administrative Contractor, who you submit your bills to.

Helen Rosso: OK.

Amy Gruber: We have designated MACs in the regions that handle our billing, billing of the claims. And so ...

Helen Rosso: OK. Got it.

Amy Gruber: I suggest that you speak with them with how that is programmed into their system.

Helen Rosso: OK. Thank you.

Operator: Your next question comes from Kathy Lester with the American Ambulance. Your line is open.

Kathy Lester. Hi, thanks. Amy, good to hear you. I just wanted to answer the question that someone asked because it may have not gotten to CMS yet, but there is actually legislation pending in the Senate that would make the add-on payments permanent beyond December 31st, 2017. And there is legislation likely to be introduced in the House soon. So the Congress is considering extending those add-on.

Amy Gruber: Thank you for the information. Do you by chance have the bill number?

Kathy Lester: Sure. Yes, in the Senate, it's S.967.

Amy Gruber: S.967, OK. Thank you.

Kathy Lester: Sure.

Operator: Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press star then the number one your telephone keypad.

Out next question is from (Judy Zhang) with (Greatman Enterprises). Your line is open.

(Judy Zhang): Yes. I was actually going to comment that there is a legislation active as of this time. It is the S.967, which is recently introduced into the Senate as of April. I was going to ask if anybody knew when the next action will be.

Operator: Our next question is from Nancy Crenshaw with Ambulance Pro. Your line is open.

Nancy Crenshaw: Thank you. This might be a question back to our MAC as well. But we've encountered a couple of issues with specific patient that we were dispatched 911 cardiac arrest. But when we arrived on the scene, it was obvious death and the coroner ruled two days prior. We're having difficulty getting our claim paid because the date of death according to the coroner, even though we weren't dispatched during an emergent situation, precedes the date of our service which we do get the bill, you know, the (AO428) QL modifier with no mileage if we responded but it (got called) on the scene. So, I did not know what advice you had for me to process this claim?

Amy Gruber: This is Amy. I think your best bet is to address this issue with your MAC.

Nancy Crenshaw: OK. Would you consider that a level one appeal then? And kind of just state our case and what the scenario is?

Amy Gruber: I'm sorry. I don't work in the appeals area. That's why I think ...

Nancy Crenshaw: OK.

Amy Gruber: your best – its best bet is to talk to the MACs.

Nancy Crenshaw: OK. Thank you.

Operator: Your next question comes from Debbie Hoffman with EMS Management. Your line is open.

Debbie Hoffman: Yes, I have a question in reference to PCS forms and prior authorization. With the current prior authorization process, we are seeing that the MACs are utilizing the date of transport versus the date the physician signed. And I just wanted to confirm with CMS, is the date of transport is different than the date the physician signed? Which date should our MACs be going based on? Should they be going based on the physician signature and allowing that 60 days? Or is it the date of transport and allowing the 60 days?

Amy Gruber: Hi, this is Amy. Can you please send your question to me, amy.gruber@cms.hhs.gov?

Debbie Hoffman: Yes, Amy, I will. Thank you.

Operator: Your next question is from (Wendy Jamarillo) with (Complete Billing Solutions). Your line is open.

(Wendy Jamarillo): Thank you. I was just getting ready to take back my moment because I just needed to verify that e-mail address but she said it again. So, I'm good.

Operator: Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press star then the number on our telephone keypad.

Your next question is from Danielle Smith with Regional Hospice. Your line is open.

Danielle Smith: Hi. I'm wondering if you can tell me if there's a comparative bid area that's done for ambulance?

Amy Gruber: Hi, this is Amy. I'm not familiar with that. However, if you'd like, you can send me an e-mail and I can research that for you.

Danielle Smith: OK, thank you.

Operator: Again, if you'd like to ask a question, please press star then the number one on your telephone keypad.

There are no further questions at this time. I will turn the call back to the presenters.

Jill Darling: All right. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining today's Ambulance Open Door Forum Call. Like Amy, said she'll get back to you with some answers from your questions. So, thanks, everyone.

The next Ambulance Open Door Forum is scheduled for September 14th. But as always, the date is always subject to change as well as the agenda item. So, we thank you for your time and have a great day.

Operator: Thank you for participating in today's ambulance open door forum conference call. This call will be available for replay beginning at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time today through the midnight on June 19th. The conference ID number for the replay is 59181948. The number to dial for the replay is 8558592056.

This concludes today's conference call. You may now disconnect.

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