



Release of Medicare Physician Utilization and Payment Data

On April 9, 2014, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the availability of the [Medicare Provider Utilization and Payment Data: Physician and Other Supplier Public Use File](#). This newly released data set covers over 880,000 distinct health care providers who collectively received \$77 billion in Medicare payments in 2012 from the Medicare Part B Fee-for-Service program.

Physician organizations have long had concerns with releasing Medicare billing information. Since 1979, courts have prevented CMS from publishing the information, yet CMS has given partial data sets to researchers. Then in June 2013, a federal judge lifted the injunction, based on a challenge from the *Wall Street Journal*. In January 2014, CMS modified the administration's policy on physician payment disclosure and [announced](#) that it would evaluate requests for physician payment information case by case. As a result, CMS received numerous requests for Medicare physician payment information. CMS determined that, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), it must make frequently requested materials available electronically. Thus, CMS decided to publicly release certain physician payment information on its website, because the FOIA requires it.

This data does not contain information from Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance), Part C (Medicare Advantage), Medicaid, Marketplace, or private insurance plans. The data also does not include information associated with clinical diagnostic laboratories or durable medical equipment. Further, this data set does not represent the medical practice's entire patient panel, and it is not risk-adjusted for severity and complexity of patients treated by the physician. The data represents revenue from Medicare Part B services before the practice's significant operating costs are deducted. The file contains information on utilization, payment (allowed amount and Medicare payment), and submitted charges organized by National Provider Identifier, Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System code, and place of service.

In a [letter](#) sent to CMS on September 5, 2013, the AAFP and others recognized the potential value of Medicare physician claims data and suggested that, if used correctly, it potentially would provide accurate and meaningful information to patients, physicians, and other stakeholders that could improve quality at the point of care. The letter urged CMS to consider carefully how use of this data may change over time and the role it may play in an evolving Medicare system. It also argued that the public's interest in disclosure of utilization and payment data from government health care programs must be balanced against the confidentiality and personal privacy interests of physicians, their practices, and patients. Finally, the letter urged CMS to ensure that the release of data does not mislead the public and advocated that the release of raw data regarding physician claims should be limited for specific purposes and with appropriate safeguards.

Physicians and other providers can access this information by downloading files split by provider last name from the CMS web site. Alternatively, the *New York Times* on its [website](#) and the *Wall Street Journal* on its [website](#) created tools to search this data by name, specialty, and city/ZIP code.

Please address questions about this matter to [Kent Moore](#), Senior Strategist for Physician Payment or [Robert Bennett](#), Federal Regulatory Manager.

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