

RURAL MATTERS

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Reimbursement Increase for Rural Hospitals

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has set new reimbursement rates starting October 1 that favor rural hospitals, reflecting changes for reimbursing hospitals for the sickest patients.

Overall operating payments per case are expected to be up about 1.8 percent, with urban hospitals getting an average increase of 1 to 1.5 percent and rural hospitals getting increases that are about 5.8 percent.

The difference comes from the threshold for outlier payments, which limit the losses a hospital will absorb for treating the sickest patients. Urban hospitals and teaching hospitals tend to have more serious cases and a greater number of patients qualifying for outlier payments. A lower threshold means greater reimbursements for hospitals.

CMS set a threshold of \$31,000 for hospitals to receive outlier payments, which was a reduction from the original proposal for more than \$50,645 and down from the current \$33,560.

J-1 Visa Services Available

Hospitals and other providers now can register for a free Internet-based service if they are profit/not-for-profit facilities that are designated as a health professional shortage area (HPSA) and/or a medically underserved area (MUA).

South West Professional Services is facilitating a free service that will bring international medical graduates that are in the U.S. on J-1/H1B/0-1 visas to rural health areas that have qualified as a HPSA and/or MUA. This service is not associated with any recruiting company or agencies.

Since this only is an information service, there are no recruitment or placement fees for employers or physicians. However, the J-1/H1B/0-1 physicians do pay a nominal yearly membership fee for services.

The service's role as liaison between the physicians and facilities through the Internet will provide efficient screening techniques to identify the J-1/H1B/0-1 visa physician who would most likely be appropriate for certain communities with a desire for a long-term commitment.

For more information, visit the web site at www.J-1DOCS.com, call toll-free at 877-441-7781 or e-mail j1docs@sisna.com.

Regarding the placement of J-1 visa physicians, it is anticipated that new rules governing the state of Tennessee's Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program will be released in the near future. New regulations will provide an opportunity to expand the total number of physicians, including the placement of some specialists in certain areas of the state.

Rural Assistance Center Announces New Web-Based Services

The Rural Assistance Center (RAC), an information portal for rural health and human services, has announced the addition of multiple new web-based services.

New features include:

- **Searchable document database:** Allows users to search RAC's database of over 800 online documents pertaining to rural health and human services.
- **Funding Announcements:** Allows users to view recent funding announcements and applications by date.
- **Funding Search:** Allows users to search funding programs by topic, sponsoring organization, health only, human services only or rural-specific only.
- **Federal Register News:** Provides daily links to *Federal Register* notices that pertain to rural health or human services interests as well as general rural items.
- **The Rural Monitor (quarterly newsletter):** Provides up-to-date and in-depth coverage of issues concerning the well-being of rural America.
- **Electronic mailing list:** Postings include *The Rural Monitor* and new items added to the RAC web site such as news, funding announcements, documents and events.

Customized assistance also is available by calling 800-270-1898 or e-mail at info@raconline.org.

Tennessee Receives Grant Awards to Strengthen Rural Hospitals

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has awarded two grants in Tennessee to improve health care for rural Tennesseans by strengthening rural hospital networks and to support the state Office of Rural Health.

The grants will help maintain and upgrade small hospitals in rural areas and coordinate and improve healthcare delivery in the state.

- **Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant, \$517,000:** These funds go mostly to help hospitals interested in being certified as critical access hospitals, upgrade quality of care and improve emergency medical services.
- **State Offices of Rural Health, \$150,000:** This grant will help the state offices provide technical assistance to rural and frontier communities, coordinate statewide rural health activities, and recruit and retain rural healthcare providers.

Mark Your Calendars

The THA Small or Rural Hospital Constituency Section will participate in the American Hospital Association's Rural Advocacy Day September 17 in Washington, DC. For additional information, contact Bill Jolley at THA, 615-256-8240, bjolley@tha.com.