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Federal portal opens for reimbursement of COVID-19 services for uninsured

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EDITOR’S NOTE: During recent weeks, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has been announcing revisions to its regulatory requirements on a near-daily basis, in an attempt to ease administrative and logistical burdens on providers amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As such, articles published on one day may later be found to contain outdated information just several days later. RACmonitor.com and ICD10monitor.com are committed to providing comprehensive coverage of these changes as they continue to be made, so please stay tuned as new developments unfold.

Stop reading this article and get reimbursed for COVID-19 care for the uninsured. That was more or less the message shared by Dr. Ronald Hirsch to the RAC Relief listeners on Monday.

“The portal has just opened to get reimbursement for care of any type provided to uninsured patients with COVID-19. The payment is at 100 percent of Medicare rates. For inpatient admissions, the hospital payment is at the DRG rate, without the 20-percent add-on,” Hirsch wrote. “I suspect this, like every other program, will run out of money, so start enrolling now and start submitting claims as soon as submissions are allowed. Don’t wait until the end of the PHE, or the money will be gone.”

The portal, operated by UnitedHealthcare (UHC) under the guise of the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is accessible online here: https://coviduninsuredclaim.linkhealth.com/

“Physicians and other healthcare providers are true heroes – especially during the COVID-19 outbreak – and HHS is grateful for their continued dedication,” a message on the portal application page reads, while also touting the initial federal stimulus programs freeing up funding to cover services for the uninsured.
Dr. Hirsch (MD, FACP, CHCQM), Vice President of the Regulations and Education Group at R1 Physician Advisory Services and a member of the Advisory Board of the American College of Physician Advisors and the American Case Management Association, labeled the move a step in the right direction, even if the funds don’t last long.

“Hospitals have always had access to additional payments for treating the uninsured through the programs embedded within the Inpatient Prospective Payment System. But physicians in private practice had no avenue to get payments, and could not even consider this free care as a charitable contribution or a tax write-off,” Hirsch wrote in an email to RACmonitor.com. “It is nice to see that HRSA and HHS have recognized the selfless contributions of physicians to this pandemic, and are allowing them to be reimbursed for care provided to the uninsured.”

“But for many small practices, they may be overwhelmed with the logistical challenges of the rapid adoption of telehealth,” Hirsch added. “I am hoping they can find some time to enroll in this program and submit claims. I am also hoping that the money gets distributed evenly, and not on a first-come, first-served basis, which would inherently favor large health systems with the resources to apply swiftly, with large-dollar inpatient claims that could quickly deplete the funds.”

The number of COVID-19 cases has approached 1 million in the U.S. during recent days, with deaths soaring to near 57,000. Both figures dwarf those of every other nation in the world, with 185 countries now recording at least one case.