AAMA Medicare Survey Summary

Thank you to all who participated in the survey regarding Medicare coverage for acupuncture services. Almost 200 members participated in the survey. More than half of the respondents were solo owners of a private practice while about 20% were employed in a group practice. Here is a summary of the survey results.

- 2/3 of respondents are in a practice that accepts Medicare patients.
- Most respondents who accept Medicare do their own acupuncture treatments.
- Of the 32 respondents who have filed claims with Medicare for coverage for acupuncture, half stated they experienced problems collecting reimbursement for services.
- Most respondents believe the AAMA should promote expansion of acupuncture services for Medicare patients BUT only if reimbursement rates equal those of private insurance.

Takeaway Points

Some respondents are optimistic that the new ruling on coverage of acupuncture for low back pain will open the door for Medicare coverage for other diagnoses. However, most respondents felt that Medicare coverage for back pain is too restrictive based on the “no identifiable systemic cause” requirement. This could give Medicare an excuse to reject the claims. Others objected to the limit on the number of treatments per year and the inability to bill an E/M code, if appropriate, at the same visit.

There is great concern that private insurance providers will lower their reimbursement rates to match those of Medicare, making it even more difficult for physician acupuncturists to provide this service to their patients. Many stated they could not afford to perform acupuncture treatments for their patients with the low Medicare reimbursement rates. They would then only perform acupuncture on a fee for service basis or refer patients to other providers.

Conclusion

The AAMA Board and Legislative Committee will work to promote Medicare coverage for acupuncture for additional diagnoses IF reimbursement rates are increased to reasonable amounts. Physicians deserve to be adequately compensated for their time and services.