

Summary of Power Wheelchair Coding Meeting

On September 1, 2004 CMS hosted a public meeting on power wheelchair codes. The format of the meeting was a presentation of 2 proposals outlining possible changes to the coding and descriptors of power wheelchairs. One proposal was a CMS proposal presented by Dr. Doran Edwards from the Statistical Analysis Durable Medical Equipment Regional Carrier (SADMERC) and the other proposal was from the National Coalition for Assistive Rehab Technology (NCART).

At the meeting, the agency introduced 33 new wheelchair codes, expanding upon an initial 18-code proposal released in August. As part of its wheelchair benefit overhaul, CMS plans to split the broad "K" codes currently in use into a variety of "E" codes.

To explain the CMS proposal, Dr. Doran Edwards, medical director for the SADMERC, provided an overview of the codes, including five for pediatric chairs, four for adult lightweight chairs, nine for standard chairs, eight for heavy-duty chairs, four for bariatric chairs and three miscellaneous codes.

More than 80 registered attendees at the meeting included representatives from the American Association for Homecare (AAHomecare), Hoveround, Invacare, The MED Group, the National Coalition for Assistive Rehab Technology (NCART), Pride Mobility, Sunrise Medical and others. Rita Hostak, president of NCART and vice president of government relations for Sunrise, presented a seven-code proposal at the meeting that NCART submitted earlier this year.

CMS' approach was different than the NCART proposal in that it does not use add-on codes for things like seat width and seat depth. Instead, [CMS] has decided to use individual codes for various chair configurations.

Mobility stakeholders commented that the inclusion of pediatric codes in the new proposal may prove valuable for state Medicaid programs and private insurers, which, due to HIPAA, must now use HCPCS coding.

The industry comments addressed concerns that included the specifics behind patient weight capacities that CMS has associated with the codes, and the fact that the agency proposes that each wheelchair should come with a basic equipment package that bundles commonly used accessories at one price. However, the tenor of the overall meeting remained positive.

After reviewing comments, CMS hopes to introduce a revised coding proposal in November. Pricing determinations will be made once the new codes are finalized. CMS hopes to have coverage guidelines finalized by Dec. 31, coding guidelines settled by late spring, and to implement the new codes by July 2005.