

PCPs using EMRs can earn more from BCBSRI

In March 2007, Rhode Island Blue Cross President Jim Purcell announced that his company would increase fees for primary care physicians (PCPs) over a three-year period starting August 1, 2007. Accordingly, all PCPs (which BCBSRI considers to be internists, family physicians, pediatricians, and geriatricians) received an initial 4 percent increase from Blue Cross effective August 1, 2007, and another 3 percent boost on April 1, 2008.

In addition, on July 1, 2008, PCPs who use a "qualified" electronic medical record (EMR) became eligible to receive an additional 5 percent increase, and they can also qualify for yet another 5 percent increase on July 1, 2009.

A "qualified" EMR must have certain functionalities for e-prescribing, clinical documentation and care management. In addition, in order to be eligible for the higher payment rates, the physician must demonstrate use of the EMR's capabilities to enhance patient care. The use of an EMR certified by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) is not required for the 2008 increase, but it will be required for the 2009 increase. (NOTE: RIMS strongly recommends that physicians in the market for an EMR system consider only CCHIT-certified products; full information is available at www.cchit.org.)

Physicians seeking to qualify for the EMR fee increases must first complete a survey, which is available online in the "Providers" section of www.bcsri.com.

BCBSRI has informed RIMS that physicians have submitted only a relatively low number of EMR surveys to date. The company says it would like to see all primary care physicians who are using a qualified EMR submit an EMR survey and qualify for the improved reimbursements.

Fee schedule changes for those who qualify will become effective 60 days after the first of the month following approval of the EMR.

Questions can be directed to the BCBSRI Physician and Provider Service Center at 401-274-4848 or 1-800-230-9050.