




Compliance TODAY

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A professional portrait of Marla Berkow, a woman with curly brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a white top. She is standing with her arms crossed against a blurred background.

Compliance and behavioral health

an interview with
Marla Berkow



FEATURES

- 16 **Meet Marla Berkow**
an interview by Adam Turteltaub
- 23 **Enforcement and regulatory concerns for hospitals in 2018**
by Arthur J. Fried, Melissa L. Jampol, and Chelsea E. Ott
Prosecutors are now able to harness the power of data analytics to identify healthcare fraud cases and find investigative leads, so momentum is clearly building for vigorous enforcement to continue in 2018.
- 32 **A review of 2017 enforcement actions against physicians**
by Jeremy Burnette, Sidney Welch, and Laura Little
Case law shows that more physicians and individual providers are in the crosshairs in False Claims Act enforcement actions.
- 40 [CEU] **Ordering and billing observation services: A simple service with complex regulations**
by Ronald Hirsch
Although it would seem straightforward to be able to calculate the number of observation hours from start to finish, there are several nuances to consider, such as “carve outs” and convenience hours.
- 46 [CEU] **Compliance investigations: When culture is the issue**
by Susan Walberg
Suggestions to help compliance professionals discern whether a pattern of complaints is a pervasive culture issue that must be addressed or just an isolated problem to keep an eye on.



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COLUMNS

- 2 **Letter from the CEO**
by Roy Snell
- 3 **Letter from the Incoming CEO**
by Gerry Zack
- 21 **Exhale**
by Catherine Boerner
- 30 **Managing Compliance**
by Lynda S. Hilliard
- 38 **The Compliance—Quality Connection**
by Sharon Parsley
- 44 **Security Awareness Reminder**
by Frank Ruelas
- 51 **Reflections in Research**
by Kelly M. Willenberg

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 **News**
- 12 **People on the Move**
- 80 **2017 *Compliance Today* Index**
- 86 **Newly Certified Designees**
- 88 **New Members**
- 90 **Blog Highlights**
- 91 **Takeaways**
- 92 **Upcoming Events**

by Kelly M. Willenberg, DBA, RN, CCRP, CHRC, CHC

Medicare DISadvantage in clinical trials

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A Medicare Advantage Plan (MAP) is a type of a Medicare health plan offered by a private company that contracts with Medicare to provide Part A and Part B benefits for beneficiaries. If a patient chooses to join a Medicare Advantage Plan, *some* clinical trial costs may be covered by the plan. What exactly does that mean for the patient?



Willenberg

According to the *Medicare Claims Processing Manual*, Chapter 68.4, clinical trials involving an investigational device are billable to Medicare as long as the services are a routine cost. The Category B device is also allowed to be billed as long as the trial is approved by Medicare. The *Medicare Managed Care Manual* then goes on to explain (in Chapter 10.7.2—Payment for Investigational Device Exemption (IDE) Studies) that the MAP is responsible for payment of claims related to enrollees' participation in both Category A and B IDE studies that are covered by the Medicare Contractor that has jurisdiction over the MAP's service area. So, the MAP is supposed to cover routine costs in IDE studies but not drug studies. Why is there a difference? Can we make this process any more confusing?

If you want to discuss this with a health insurance administrator at Medicare who oversees the MAPs, the questions regarding billing and specific coverage policies can be brought to the Center for Clinical Standards and Quality (CCSQ) and CMS overall. The real questions remain: (1) Why do MAPs sometimes not cover device studies when they should according to CMS? (2) Why do MAPs direct sites to bill traditional Medicare for device studies in writing? (3) Why do MAPs sometimes cover drug trials when all do not?

As a clinical trial billing consultant, the questions about differences based on drug vs. device trials deserve answers. It takes a tremendous amount of personnel to manually submit claims to original Medicare, then ensure that the MAP covers the difference between original Medicare cost-sharing incurred for qualified clinical trial items and services, and the MAP's in-network cost-sharing for the same category of items and services. Many practices and hospitals struggle to get this correct, because it is a totally manual process.

I challenge Medicare and the CCSQ to review the distinction. CMS provided the clinical trial policy in 2000 and the device rules in 1995. Can we move towards a re-evaluation of this multifaceted process? Help beneficiaries avoid finding themselves in a Medicare DISadvantage situation for the trial they want to participate in! 🗨️