



CMS confirms Physician Fee Schedule cuts; SVS members asked to contact lawmakers

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By Bryan Kay and Beth Bales

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) has delivered a blow to vascular surgery in the form of a 7% cut in total payment for the services it provides. The cuts are included in the agency's final rule for Medicare payments under the Physician Fee Schedule (PFS), and were slated to take effect Jan. 1, 2021.

News of the payment reductions came Dec. 1, as CMS announced what it called "a broader administration-wide strategy to create a healthcare system that results in better accessibility, quality, affordability, empowerment, and innovation."

The final PFS conversion factor for 2021 is \$32.41, a decrease of \$3.68 from 2020's \$36.09.

Earlier this year, Margaret C. Tracci, MD, chair of the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) Government Relations Committee, and Matthew J. Sideman, MD, chair of SVS' Policy and Advocacy Council, spoke of the high stakes involved, should CMS not amend the rule. Their warnings have come to pass.

"What will this look like on Jan. 1?" Tracci and Sideman wrote in the September issue of *Vascular Specialist*, as the SVS sought to help lobbying efforts against the cuts.

"The conversion factor (CF), or dollar amount per work RVU, will drop nearly 11% – by \$3.83 – from this year's CF of \$36.09 to \$32.26.

"Pause for a moment to reflect on the fact that this is less in actual, noninflation adjusted dollars than we were paid back in 1998. In fact, had 1998 payment levels kept up with inflation over the past 27 years, the CF for 2021 should be \$57 per RVU, representing an inflation-adjusted loss of more than 43%. This amounts to an acute collapse layered on top of a long-term devaluation of physician services that has gone on—essentially unchecked—for 27 years."

U.S. Reps. Ami Bera (CA-7) and Larry Buschon (IN-8) introduced "Holding Providers Harmless from Medicare Cuts During Covid-19 Act of 2020" in a bid to stave off the cuts.

There were 54 co-sponsors of the bill, and SVS members were urged to contact their lawmakers in an effort to stop the

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cuts before adjournment of Congress at the end of the year.

As the year was coming to a close, SVS president Ronald L. Dalman, MD, said, “The bill introduced by Reps. Bera and Bucshon is a win for patients and a win for physicians, and I urge all members of Congress to support it.

“Our healthcare system is under extraordinary pressure, and now is the time for Congress to act and protect our patients.”

Sideman, meanwhile, urged all SVS members to contact their lawmakers via Voter Voice to ask them to act.

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