

PECOS IS DELAYED—CMS Postpones PECOS to January 3, 2011

CMS announced today that it will delay until January 3, 2011 the provider enrollment requirements under the Provider Enrollment, Chain and Ownership System (PECOS).

Facing overwhelming enrollment problems, CMS recognized that it was unable to implement PECOS on the scheduled implementation date of April 5, 2010.

AAHomecare has been working closely with CMS to raise awareness about troubling aspects of the program since the issue first arose in October 2009. AAHomecare met with senior CMS officials repeatedly to raise concerns about how this program would adversely affect Medicare HME providers and patients. In a formal letter to CMS, the Association also requested a lengthy delay so patient access to homecare would continue and provider cash flow would not evaporate when the program was implemented on January 5, 2010 – the date for PECOS implementation before the first postponement.

AAHomecare communicated with CMS officials several times per week leading up to the latest delay in order to keep CMS abreast of actual provider experiences and shortcomings of the PECOS program.

The Association also reached out to the American Medical Association (AMA) and the physician community to work cooperatively in order to obtain a delay in the program. An AMA representative said, "We are getting plenty of calls and emails from physicians saying they are not able to get through to customer service lines like PECOS if they have a question. There are long wait times to get through and general problems getting applications processed." CMS stated on the call today that it plans to send a letter to all physicians who last enrolled more than six years ago to remind them to re-enroll in PECOS. The agency also said providers will continue to receive informational messages on PECOS, and CMS will make updates to the physician records periodically.

"PECOS is a classic example of the documentation and administrative burden that is part of doing business with Medicare," commented AAHomecare President Tyler Wilson. "In many cases, the rules and regulations create almost impossible demands for filing claims. AAHomecare was a pit bull in fighting this issue through our contacts with CMS and I am glad to see the agency pull back from the brink of implementing such an impractical requirement."

While the PECOS program has been delayed, HME providers will continue to see warnings on their claims because the PECOS enrollment process will continue. AAHomecare will push CMS to publicize PECOS requirements with physicians similar to the way it handled the National Provider Identifier (NPI) number issue. During the NPI start-up process, CMS was sending out public announcements several times each week.

AAHomecare Vice President for Government Affairs Walt Gorski said, "Ideally, we would like to see some sort of requirement that ties physicians to the PECOS enrollment process. Their claims were not in jeopardy, but ours were. The burden should not be

placed on the HME provider to press physicians to enroll. Nevertheless, this is an excellent outcome.”

Gorski added, “We greatly appreciate the work of the AAHomecare State Leaders’ Advisory Council for developing a PECOS survey to document the extent of the PECOS problems. The delay of implementation of PECOS edits and claims rejections demonstrate the importance of advocacy and action within the home medical equipment sector and also the value of collaboration with other health sectors.”