



CHCPP NEWS

COMMISSION ON
HEALTH CARE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Commission Tests Utilization Database

The Commission on Health Care Policy and Practice (CHCPP), in conjunction with the SNM Technologist Task Force on Utilization Data, is currently developing a section on the SNM's website. The website's data entry form will collect information from nuclear medicine practitioners to compile a utilization analysis database. "Utilization management is a critical element of health care delivery and the associated requirements of preserving quality while reducing unnecessary costs," according to James Fletcher, MD, vice-chair of the Commission on Health Care Policy and Practice, who spearheads the project. "This project will provide SNM members with a yardstick for comparing their own practice referral patterns with national and other local patterns," he added. The first year's objectives are to design the database and web-based data entry form

and solicit participants to submit data. The committee has gained support from the SNM's Technologist Section to recruit both hospital- and nonhospital-based participants for the program.

For the pilot database demonstrated at the SNM annual meeting this June in San Antonio, more than 20 nuclear medicine departments/facilities volunteered to input their data from 1996. The database contains information on facility type and location; number of active general medicine and surgical beds; number of outpatient encounters (visits); number of physician, technologist and clerical FTEs; number of operational planar and SPECT gamma cameras; and the number of inpatient and outpatient procedures for a selected set of commonly used nuclear medicine CPT-4 codes. The project will be reviewed and the database will be

refined before full availability to all institutions who perform nuclear medicine, which could be fall of 1997.

Participants will enter data quarterly. Participation offers extensive advantages in that the database will provide standard reports for participants on utilization by procedure, place of service, type of patient, etc. Participants will be able to compare their facility data with others in the region and with the national (global) averages. This type of information is essential in anticipating workload and rates of use in a given population when dealing with a managed care group contract or considering a proposed capitation model contract. For more information or to participate in this program, contact Wendy Smith, Associate Director of Health Care Policy at (703) 708-9000, ext. 242 or via e-mail at wsmith@snm.org.

Proposed Practice Expense Rule Delayed

At a recent AMA meeting, HCFA officials reported that the National Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) for resource-based relative value units (RVUs) for practice expense will be delayed until mid-June. The NPRM was expected to be published in the Federal Register about May 1. Since the rule is scheduled to be implemented on January 1, 1998, critics are disturbed because HCFA will have little time to consider comments. (Specialty societies will have a 60-day period to respond to the rule.) Experts anticipate that HCFA will get numerous comments in the late summer, which must be answered by November 1. The final rule must be published 60 days prior to implementation.

This summer, the SNM Coding and Reimbursement Committee will survey a

minimum of 50 members to validate the direct expenses for staff, equipment and supplies as generated by the Clinical Practice Expert Panels. Based on the proposed rulemaking and the analysis of the survey data, the SNM will make formal comment to HCFA on the practice expense issue.

At the same time, the SNM has been active in the Practice Expense Coalition to combat negative reductions in reimbursement for nuclear medicine (projected from 4%-24%). The Coalition is a group of medical specialty societies representing surgeons, ophthalmologists, cardiologists, emergency physicians, gastroenterologists, psychiatrists, anesthesiologists, pathologists, nuclear medicine practitioners and others. The Coalition wants Congress to delay implementation for at

least two years to allow HCFA to redo the practice expense calculation under explicit Congressional instructions. These specific instructions to HCFA would be to redo the work along cost accounting lines and collect new data from a representative sample of practice, thus achieving more accuracy and verifiability. The Coalition will also seek a three year transition after completion of the new analysis. In doing so, the Coalition's strategic efforts are targeted at the Office of Management and Budget, congressional legislation and through a third-party grassroots effort. If necessary, the Coalition will consider litigation. HCFA has intimated support for a three-year transition period of the current data for new practice expense RVUs.

SNM Procedure Guidelines Manual Becomes Available

The Commission on Health Care Policy and Practice's Guidelines and Communications Committee announces the publication of the Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) Procedure Guidelines Manual 1997. The manual contains the twenty-six procedure guide-

lines which have been approved by the SNM's House of Delegates. The manual may be purchased by contacting Olivia Wong at (703) 708-9000, ext. 250 or via e-mail at owong@snm.org. The cost of the Procedure Guidelines Manual is \$20.00.