
The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig



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March 3, 2010

Dear Member:

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) believes in being open with our physician members. I'm writing to let you know about an error that has been discovered in the calculations made for the April 1, 2009 allocation (i.e., for the current fiscal year period April 1, 2009 - March 31, 2010).

The error affects physicians in the sections of General Practice and Internal Medicine and the executives of these sections were notified accordingly as soon as the error was identified.

What has happened

Due to a miscalculation, fee codes for the Section of General Practice and Section of Internal Medicine were set too high in the April 1, 2009 allocation, i.e., General Practice and Internal Medicine fees have been overpaid since April.

I want to let you know what we have done since the error was discovered, what it means for the physicians involved and the steps we are taking to ensure it does not happen again.

Discovery and notification

The error was discovered February 12. Senior staff conducted an analysis and verified the nature of the error, whereupon Alberta Health and Wellness was immediately notified.

Our next step was to speak directly with the presidents and fees representatives of the sections involved. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr. Ann R. Vaidya and Dr. Peter C. Jamieson, Section of General Practice, and Dr. Raj S. Padwal and Dr. Brian J. Wirzba, Section of Internal Medicine, for their cooperation and understanding while still advocating clearly for their constituent members.

What it means for General Practice and Internal Medicine physicians

It's important to note that the physicians affected will not be subject to any clawbacks on fees or payments made before the error was discovered.

On April 1, 2010, all physicians will be due to receive the final allocation under the current trilateral agreement. General Practice and Internal Medicine physicians will still receive a fee increase. The two sections have been working with AMA Health Economics staff to identify codes – billed exclusively by those sections – that would be most suitable in the 2010 allocation for an adjustment to correct the overpayment. We will be working to minimize the number of codes involved and therefore the impact on internal fee relativity.

The bottom line is that, although fees for these sections were overpaid this year, we will compensate within the allocation for 2010-11. At the end of the two-year period April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2011, the affected sections will have received the same fee increases as they would have if the error had not occurred. Overall fee increases for other sections are not affected by either last year's overpayment or the forthcoming adjustment.

How do we prevent this from happening again?

Experiences like these are rare, but they are unfortunate and we take them seriously. We will do everything in our power to avoid further similar incidents.

The AMA continues to work with the sections involved. On Monday, the AMA presented a proposal incorporating this work to the trilateral Physician Services Committee. The proposal was approved and we will continue now to implement the April 1, 2010 allocation. There will be no other impact or delay.

We can and will be reviewing exactly what happened in extreme detail. We are undergoing a quality improvement and assurance exercise to update policies and processes for the future. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

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Our commitment to be open with you continues and we will keep you informed.

Yours truly,

Christopher J. (Chip) Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC
President