



GEORGIA'S SOURCE FOR IMPORTANT PHYSICIAN INFORMATION

Medical Association of Georgia Plays Major Role in Settlement Negotiations

Judge Federico Moreno has given preliminary approval to the proposed Aetna U.S. Healthcare settlement, which the Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) was instrumental in reaching in May. Judge Moreno will conduct a fairness hearing on October 13, 2003, at which time final approval is expected. As the settlement moves forward, MAG will provide updates and detailed instructions to its members advising them as to what they need to do to participate.

The MAG staff is available to answer your questions regarding this precedent-setting settlement including:

- How does the Aetna settlement affect my patients and my practice?
- Since MAG sued Aetna on behalf of its members,

will the settlement apply to non-MAG members?

- How do I get my settlement money?
- What can I expect to see regarding relief going forward?
- What is the timetable for implementation of the settlement?
- What if I don't like the settlement and want to opt out?

MAG welcomes the opportunity to meet with physicians, including medical staff, county societies and specialty groups, to discuss the terms of the settlement agreement. To arrange such a meeting, call MAG's Office of the General Counsel at 404-881-5080. ●

Risk Management Tips

Medical Record Authentication

Every entry in the health record, whether in paper or electronic format, should be authenticated by the author and should not be signed by someone other than the author. Signing off on entries in the medical record is essential.

- Read everything you dictate, write and sign
- Develop an office sign-off policy

The Federal Regulations/Interpretive Guidelines for Hospitals (42 CFR 482.24(c)(1)(i)) indicate that only the author of an entry authenticates his or her entry. The interpretive guidelines specifically identify unacceptable authentication: "failure to disapprove an entry within a specific time period is not acceptable as authentication. Auto-authentication, in which a physician or other practitioner authenticates a report before transcription, is not consistent with the requirements. There should be a method of determining that the practitioner did, in fact, authenticate the document after it was transcribed."

The "Dictated But Not Read Stamp" falls in the category of unacceptable authentication. Many physicians continue to use these stamps with false reassurance, unaware that a credibility problem exists for those medical records along with a liability exposure.

For more information on this or any other risk management issue, please call MAG Mutual at 404-842-5600 or 800-282-4882. ●

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. "2002 Federal Regulations for Hospitals: State Operations Manual, Appendix A. Interpretive Guidelines - Hospitals."

Physician FAQ on HIPAA

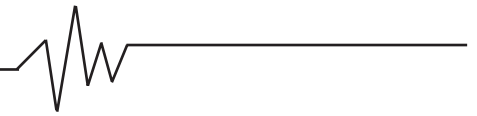
This is the second in a three-part series of frequently asked questions and answers concerning HIPAA.

Q: I'm concerned that not meeting the upcoming Transaction and Code Set requirement deadline could result in cash flow and claims filing problems. What should I do?

A: Many physicians and managers are concerned that something may happen if their vendors do not make the deadline for compliance with the standards. You should be especially concerned if you are not using software vendors large enough—and financially stable enough—to meet HIPAA's requirements (and the other information needs of today's modern medical practice). You should be asking software vendors:

- When do you plan to have thoroughly tested upgrades to the national standards?
- What do you plan to charge for the upgrades?

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(Physician FAQ, continued from page 1)

- What will the upgrades cost my practice?

Your vendor should be able to answer these questions. While there is still time before compliance is required, the deadline is **October 16, 2003**.

Make sure you look for the exact version/release of the software you use. Also notice which third-party entity has tested and/or certified the software according to the standards. There are also companies that offer software that supposedly allows one to test their system to make sure it is compliant with the transaction standards. Whatever tools you use, we encourage you to ask your software vendor questions directly.

If your software vendor is not ready, there are some alternatives. For example, one option for medical practices that for any reason can't meet the compliance deadline of **October 16, 2003** (assuming no further extension) is to use a clearinghouse or billing service to translate transactions.

MAG Mutual Healthcare Solutions, Inc. is ready to help you. Please call David Miller at 770-931-7700 or visit www.coderscentral.com.

Next month, we will discuss what you should do if you haven't completed the steps necessary to comply with HIPAA. ●

Act Now! Term Life Insurance Rates Are Increasing

Term life insurance rates have been dropping approximately five percent per year over the past three years, but this trend is coming to a halt. Many term life insurance carriers are currently filing rate increases in all states. Some rate increases will begin taking effect at the end of the summer; most will be fully in effect by the end of this year.

For the next few months, term life insurance costs will remain at historically low prices. Contact MAG Mutual Financial Services, Inc. immediately to beat the rate increases. Call Ron Lundy at 800-282-4882 or 404-842-5567. ●

Did you know?

Refinancing your existing home or purchasing a new one presents an excellent opportunity to review your homeowners insurance coverages. You may discover that major renovations or recent purchases are not adequately protected by your current policy.

Here's a quick checklist that might save you time, protection and money.

- Do your property limits reflect the estimated cost to rebuild your home today?
- Do you own jewelry, fine arts or other collectibles that might be underinsured in the event of a loss?
- Are you taking advantage of higher deductibles that save you money and make your account more attractive to the insurance company?
- Are you receiving a package discount for having your home, autos and umbrella insured with the same insurance company?
- Do you need to consider buying a separate flood insurance policy or adding earthquake coverage to your homeowners policy?

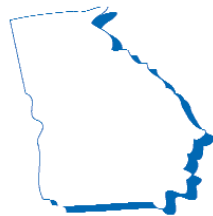
If you answer "yes" to any of the above, let MAG Mutual Insurance Agency work with you to compare rates and coverage options from top-rated carriers like Atlantic Mutual, Chubb and Fireman's Fund. Call John Guthrie or Donna Freeman at 404-842-5600 or 800-282-4882. ●

HIPAA Business Agreement available at www.magmutual.com

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