Groups Back ACO Concept

Expected to issue regulations later, perhaps by early 2011.

CMS has been looking at a risk-sharing payment methodology that would reward providers for improved quality and lower costs.

The Joint Principles for Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs), proposed by the primary care groups outlines a number of principles that should guide that payment system. For instance, incentives should “adequately reflect the relative contributions of participating physicians,” and practices that participate in ACOs and achieve recognition as medical homes “should receive additional financial incentives,” according to the Joint Principles.

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) has backed the ACO concept and the notion of shared savings as a means to eliminate inefficiencies. In comments submitted to CMS on Nov. 22, MedPAC Chairman Glenn Hackworth wrote, “If structured carefully, a shared savings program for ACOs could present an opportunity to correct some of the undesirable incentives inherent in fee-for-service payment and reward providers who are doing their part to control costs and improve quality.” Shared savings could also “help beneficiaries receive more coordinated care and become more engaged with their care management, particularly if beneficiaries are informed when they are assigned to ACOs,” Mr. Hackworth wrote.

The American Medical Association (AMA) also has established guiding principles for ACOs. Members approved the 13 principles at its interim House of Delegates meeting in November. The AMA is concerned that existing antitrust and fraud rules can make it difficult for physicians to participate in ACOs. The organization called for increased flexibility in those laws, and for the FTC to provide explicit exceptions to antitrust laws for ACO participants.

ACOs should be retained for patient care services and distributed to ACO participants, and the organizations should also be allowed to use a variety of payment models, according to the AMA. Healthy People 2020 launched

Healthy People 2010 is growing up. On Dec. 2, the Department of Health and Human Services announced the birth of Healthy People 2020, a new generation of the nation’s 10-year plan for health promotion and disease prevention.

“The launch of Healthy People 2020 comes at a critical time,” said Secretary Kathleen Sebelius in a press statement. “Our challenge and opportunity is to avoid preventable disease from occurring in the first place.” Because chronic diseases—such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer—account for 70% of deaths and consume 75% of national health spending, Healthy People 2020 stresses improvement in lifestyle changes that have repeatedly been proved to protect against those disorders. “Many of the risk factors that contribute to the development of these diseases are preventable,” said Dr. Howard Koh, assistant secretary for health.

Healthy People is the nation’s road map and compass for better health, providing our society a vision for improving both the quantity and quality of life for all Americans.” Healthy People 2020 isn’t just intended for individuals, though, Dr. Jonathan Fielding said during a press briefing on the program’s launch. Researchers, clinicians, educators, and members of both public and private health care agencies need to band together to make the program a success, said Dr. Fielding, chairman of the Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2020.

In response to the growing elderly segment of the U.S. population, the new program includes a topic area for demographics that includes Alzheimer’s disease. The new areas in the initiative are early and middle childhood and adolescent health; blood disorders and blood safety; genomics; global health; and health-related quality of life and well-being.

Like all children growing up in a technology-based society, Healthy People 2020 will incorporate the Internet and social networking as well as health care and technology media in both its message and its method. The newly designed Web site allows users to tailor information to their individual needs and look for evidence-based ways to put the program’s recommendations to work in their lives.

Developers are also issuing a challenge to encourage the tech-savvy to create easy-to-use applications for those who are working with Healthy People 2020 objectives and community health data. Winning ideas will reap financial rewards—$4,000 in prize money is available.