

Good and bad news for Hospice

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Dear Editor,

As the U.S. Congress meets to discuss the new health care law, perhaps we should reflect on recent good and bad news for Hospice already in the works.

A recent news alert from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) may bode well for Hospice. MedPAC, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, met Jan. 14 to recommend a one percent update in Hospice payment rates for FY2012.

Especially for rural areas, the commission voted to increase overall revenues for provider-based, nonprofit hospices, while revenues will decrease for others. Hospice of the Plains is a rural nonprofit hospice in northeastern Colorado. It's not known if these recommendations will be implemented, but public support will be needed to make them a reality.

On the negative side, a recent top-level decision disappointed the Hospice community. Physicians will no longer get paid for talking with patients about advance care planning in their "welcome to Medicare" exams.

Although this voluntary consultation has been in effect since 2008, the administration has reversed the decision. This reversal eliminates initial communication between those joining Medicare and medical personnel. Local efforts to inform people about advance care planning must be stepped up to fill this gap. Such information is available at Hospice of the Plains.

Domenic Fuccillo
Hospice of the Plains