

AWP, APC, Oral Drugs Plus Much More Discussed

ACCC's 18th National Oncology Economics Conference held Oct. 3-6, 2001, in Seattle, Wash., drew more than 300 attendees who were advised that before Congress recesses at the end of October major legislative changes are expected in Medicare payment for cancer drugs as well as for physician practice expenses.

"ACCC as well as other leaders in oncology and patient advocacy continue to provide data to federal policymakers and discuss with them options to provide a favorable solution about Medicare reimbursement for oncology drugs," said Christian Downs, ACCC managing director of provider economics and public policy.

Over the past several years, the Health Care Financing Administration (now the Centers for Medicare



& Medicaid or CMS), the General Accounting Office (GAO), and federal lawmakers have studied and reported that Medicare payment for drugs, including oncology, under the average wholesale price (AWP) is too high and needs to be cut.

Downs pointed out that changes

Sharon B. Murphy, M.D., (at left) and G. Denman Hammond, M.D., each received ACCC's annual Clinical Research Award for significant contributions to cancer research. ACCC President Teresa D. Smith, R.N., M.S.N., (center) presented the awards.

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to AWP will affect both the hospital outpatient department and the physician office setting. Currently AWP minus 5 percent is "break even" to cover chemotherapy costs in physician practices. Any further payment reduction could lead to the closing of physician practices. Oncology care delivery would then need to be shifted to outpatient hospital departments that currently may not have the capacity to provide more cancer care services. Oncology leaders at ACCC's conference spoke of the need to engage hospitals to be part of the safety net in capacity building.

Downs also noted that passage by Congress this year of a Medicare Outpatient Prescription Drug Benefit Plan and oral drug legislation entitled Access to Cancer Therapies Act would be difficult. However, some provisions may be addressed in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation bill.

"We will see an oral drug benefit for Medicare in the near future," Downs said.

For more details about the meeting, go to ACCC's web site at www.accc-cancer.org.