Government paying most doctors full Medicare fees

April 16 2015, byAlan Fram

Legislation preventing immediate, deep cuts in doctors' Medicare reimbursements hasn't been signed into law yet, but the government is paying most physicians their full fees anyway.

That's a different scenario than federal officials and lawmakers described earlier this week, when Senate and House leaders were fending off eleventh-hour objections and shepherding the legislation to final congressional approval.

The Senate approved the bill Tuesday night, following House passage in March. The bill blocks a 21 percent cut in Medicare payments that was due to take effect this month, and it revamps how physicians will be paid in the future.

As the measure neared passage, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said that without action, it would start making payments at the lower rates on Wednesday.

Congressional leaders warned lawmakers to act quickly to prevent those cuts from taking effect. The Centers process about 4 million claims daily—enough to potentially trigger a flood of complaints from doctors and Medicare's elderly beneficiaries that legislators wanted to avoid.

But while Congress has completed the measure, the paperwork wasn't immediately sent to President Barack Obama for his promised signature.

Even so, the agency said it is already making most payments at the full rates.

In a written statement to health care providers, it said only "a small volume of claims" are being processed at the lower levels. Those payments will later be reprocessed so providers receive their full fees, the agency said.

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