



PRACTICE REVENUE OPTIMIZATION
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Did You Know?

A deep-freezing technique known as cryoablation is a viable alternative to traditional surgery in many early-stage breast cancers, researchers have discovered.

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Less Hospitals Earn Medicare Bonuses Under Value-Based Purchasing

More than 1,600 hospitals will see bonuses from Medicare in 2017 under the Hospital Value-Based Purchasing program, according to federal data released November 1st. The number earning positive pay adjustments is about 200 fewer than last year. This program affects approximately 3,000 hospitals, which are penalized or rewarded based on how well they perform on certain quality measures. These hospitals performances are assessed in comparison to their peers, as well as to their own performances over time. The results are "somewhat concerning," said Francois de Brantes, executive director of the Health Care Incentives Improvement Institute. One reason was the fact that fewer hospitals are being rewarded. Another was hospitals' lack of movement in rankings.

The number of hospitals whose payments were docked grew from 1,236 in 2016 to 1,343 in 2017, according to an analysis of the data. Last year, 59% of hospitals received bonus payments; this year 55% did. More than half of the 2,879 hospitals in the program both years will see lower payment adjustments in 2017 than in 2016. Payments improved for 1,388 of those hospitals. CMS also announced several changes to the program for fiscal 2018. The four domains on which hospitals are scored—clinical care; patient and caregiver-centered experience and care coordination; safety; and efficiency and cost reduction—will be weighted equally. Also, CMS removed two measures from clinical care and added a care transition dimension. The results show "how progress on quality can be accelerated when pay-for-performance programs reward both achievement and improvement," said Nancy Foster, the American Hospital Association's vice president of quality and patient safety policy. "However, CMS must continue to refine the program to ensure that it effectively drives quality forward for hospitals and the patients they serve," she added.

Topical Therapy For Radiation-Induced Skin Damage Shows Promise

A team of University of Pittsburgh researchers has demonstrated that a newly developed topical therapy applied before or after radiation exposure prevents skin damage in both animal and human models. The results, published online in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, are expected to accelerate efforts that will lead to clinical studies and licensing of the technology, said Louis Faló, M.D., chairman of the Department of Dermatology at the Pitt School of Medicine and corresponding author for the study. Dr. Faló teamed with Joel Greenberger, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Radiation Oncology, and Peter Wipf, Ph.D., Distinguished University Professor of Chemistry, in 2008. Dr. Wipf's lab developed a molecule that targets the formation of oxidative free radicals in the cell's mitochondria, thereby preventing inflammation and cell death.

"This provides for potentially improved treatment options for patients undergoing radiation therapy with the prospect for more simplified treatment regimens and reduced concern about quality of life post-treatment," he said. Dr. Wipf's former student, Joshua Pierce, Ph.D., who now operates his own lab at North Carolina State University, is credited with synthesizing the molecule, named JP4-039.

Dr. Faló said he is optimistic about the therapy's performance in clinical trials because the treatment appears to be effective in a model that uses human skin obtained from cosmetic procedures.