

**CMS AGREES TO ASE’S REQUEST FOR INCREASED MEDICARE PAYMENT FOR STRESS TEST/STRESS ECHOS PERFORMED IN HOSPITAL OUTPATIENT DEPARTMENTS.**

Today, CMS released its proposed Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment rates for CY 2010. Generally, the rates for echocardiography reflect modest increases for the technical component of echocardiography services performed in hospital outpatient departments, which is in sharp contrast to significant reductions proposed for the technical component of echo services performed in physicians’ offices.

In the proposed rule, CMS specifically noted ASE’s comments objecting to the elimination of Medicare payment for the stress test component of stress echocardiograms furnished in hospital settings. In response, CMS reclassified CPT 93351 (stress test/stress echo) into the APC for “Level III” Echocardiography, at a rate that is approximately \$159 higher than the current rate.

Specifically, the notice proposes the following changes:

Level I Echo (Generally limited echocardiography procedures):	\$260.37
Level II Echo (e.g. TTE (adult and congenital):	\$452.59
Level III Echo (e.g. TEE, stress echo (with stress test)	\$590.75

CMS is proposing to pay for all contrast-enhanced echocardiograms \$653.96, which is higher than the current rate of approximately \$566, but lower than the rate for an unenhanced stress test/stress echo. ASE will be considering whether to comment on this issue.

In addition, CMS took the opportunity to clarify that the same physician supervision requirements apply to echocardiograms and other diagnostic services performed in hospital outpatient departments and other provider-based entities that apply to physicians’ offices.