April 2018: Did you know you can look up Medicare’s fee schedule online?

Questions always seem to come in groups, just like celebrity deaths...or it could be observational bias. Either way, as Q2 started, we received several requests for the 2018 Medicare Fee Schedule or inquiries about how to find this information. The fee schedule can be found on CMS’s website. You can either Google “Physician Fee Schedule Look Up” or type: https://go.cms.gov/2aAOFlH. Like most government-run websites, they have a ton of information that is very difficult to access. But once you learn to navigate the labyrinth, it reveals a great number of valuable secrets.

First, navigate to the Look-Up tool and click on “Start Search.” From here you must accept their licensing agreement. Once you are into the actual search tool, you can define for what you are looking.

Notice on the screen below, you can select just pricing information, RVUs, All the info, etc. If you choose “All,” you will get a lot of info that seems irrelevant for our normal purposes, but it will also provide the global periods for the CPT you are searching.

Below that you can choose to look by a single code, multiple codes, or a range of codes. Once you define for what you are looking, click Submit to retrieve the information.

Next, you will see a horizontally-oriented table with many pieces of information. The most commonly needed information is the “Non-Facility Price.” This is the dollar value that a Medicare participating doctor will be reimbursed for the CPT code they looked up.

The last handy piece of information I’ll mention is the global period. This is hiding to the far right on the horizontal table. You must scroll far over to find it. But it’s nice to be able to look at a legitimate source, versus searching Google and finding a random article writing four years ago. Using primary sources like this is what allows you to make solid decisions for your practice.

Every year you should evaluate your fee by comparing them to your top payers. Medicare may or may not be one of them, but it always seems to be the one benchmark against which optometrist judge their fee schedules. List out those top payers’ reimbursements for your top 10-15 CPT codes and make sure they make sense. You may notice that you are still charging $85 for a pachy when it now reimburses $18. Or you might be only charging $55 for a 99213, when it now reimburses $75. You need to set your fees at what makes sense for your office and local market. But if your fees are grossly out-of-whack, you may want to consider adjusting them. You don’t want to leave money on the table, nor do you want to have write-offs that make your CPA scream.