

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 279 (Delegate Costa)
Health and Government Operations

Health Occupations - Physicians - Payments for Office Visits

This bill prohibits a licensed physician from billing for an office visit if the physician does not begin treatment within 30 minutes of the scheduled office visit, except if delayed by an emergency. A physician may bill for a procedure performed during such an office visit. If delayed by an emergency, the physician must provide the patient with an emergency medical services verification number for the emergency.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal reduction in Medicaid expenditures (50% federal funds, 50% general funds) to the extent that physicians serving Medicaid clients are prohibited from billing for office visits under the bill.

Local Effect: To the extent that local health departments have scheduled visits for clinical services that they currently bill for, revenues for local health departments may decline by a minimal amount.

Small Business Effect: Minimal. Physicians in small businesses may experience reduced reimbursements to the extent they are unable to bill for late office visits.

Analysis

Background: In addition to medical emergencies, there are numerous reasons why a physician may be running late for an office visit – overscheduling; other patients arriving late for their appointments; other patients bringing up additional medical concerns at their appointments; telephone calls with insurance companies, pharmacies, and other providers; and delays while making hospital rounds.

A 2010 report by Press Ganey, a health care consulting firm, found that the average wait time at physicians' offices is 24 minutes. At some practices, however, patients may wait significantly longer. Overall patient satisfaction declines the longer a patient must wait. A white paper also issued by the firm notes that waiting to see a physician is "a huge dissatisfier that increases patient anxiety and is frequently cited as a reason why patients leave a practice."

Several organizations, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, have issued recommendations on how physician practices can reduce patient wait times (including longer appointment times, additional same-day appointments, handing routine follow-up appointments via telephone or email, and other workflow improvements), as well as enhance patients' experience while waiting.

Additional Comments: The bill does not authorize the State Board of Physicians to enforce the prohibition nor discipline physicians who do not comply. The board indicates that it generally does not get involved in billing disputes between licensees and patients but instead refers such cases to the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Health Claims Alternative Dispute Resolution Office; Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Maryland Insurance Administration; Press Ganey, *Keeping Me Waiting*; Department of Legislative Services

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