



MMS talks with Bill Appling about ACMPE Board Position

by: Victor J. Carrozza

MMS – Tell us about the ACMPE Board of Directors and how it is structured?

Bill – There are ten members on this board from across the country. I think the benefit of me serving on this board will be very beneficial to our local medical community, because I will be “plugged in” at the beginning of issues and be proactive, rather than reactive. Since I am very engaged with our medical community, and have had years of working with physicians and others in it, I am able to take back to this board issues that I am hearing from our physicians. Many of the same concerns that affect our physicians, affect others in all parts of the country.

MMS – What are some of the benefits that our medical community may see with your recent election to the ACMPE Board of Directors?

Bill – This national board and member association has over 22,000 members nationwide, including both physicians and clinic administrators. The board looks to address issues which affect medical groups across the country and acts as an advocate for physician groups both regionally and nationally. I was nominated and asked if I would consider membership on this board. I had previously been a board member back in 1995. There was a lot going on then in the medical community, but not near as much as now with healthcare reform. I thought, “When would be a better time to be on a national healthcare board than now and be involved in the process?”

This group has had a lot of involvement over the years regarding issues which affect physicians. It has testified before congressional committees on a number of issues about the potential impact to patients and physicians. Over the years, we have been out front on issues, such as Medicare cuts to physicians and helped to eliminate much of the initial rules that HIPAA attempted to enact on medical groups. We also have testified on issues and made recommendations for certain changes in the Stark rules. I could go on and on regarding the influence we have had to reduce many of the issues negatively impacting physicians.

MMS – What are some of the other issues that this board is looking at and involved with?

Bill – (*laughing*) I don’t think there is enough room in this article to talk about all of them, so let me mention a few. We have expressed again our concern with the Sustainable Growth Rate formula as flawed. It needs to have a permanent fix, not just a patch. If you look at 2009 and the medical inflation, physicians are currently at the same level they were in 2001, with some variation by certain specialties. We have also expressed our concern with Electronic Health Record’s meaningful use. It impacts the physician practices if they select a system which does not keep up with the certification process, which gets harder each year starting in 2011 and target date is 2015. If a physician purchases a certain EHR and the software vendor is not compliant, then the penalty falls on the physician. This year, Dr. William Jessee, president of MGMA was asked to serve on the CCHIT group which certifies vendors and will help define meaningful use.

Another important issue we are advocating is to identify and reduce unnecessary administrative complexity in the medical practice. We have expressed our concern with the Recovery Audit Contractors hired by CMS. We have politely said they are nothing but bounty hunters working off commission. We have gathered information from some of the initial RAC demonstration projects and are sharing information we have gathered with members. We will continue to monitor these audits. I was able to share information, because I have been involved with some groups who were audited under the demonstration project. Our input helped to place the medical group on a more level field with the RACs, than they were under the demonstration project.

Bill Appling is President of Watkins Uiberall Healthcare Group. He recently attended a meeting of the board of directors for the Medical Group Management Association/American College of Medical Practice Executives. Bill will serve a three year term on this board, which started in October 2009.