CRAIN'S HEALTH PULSE NEW YORK

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Home care providers up against reimbursement issue during outbreak

As the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and other home health care providers assist overwhelmed hospitals during the Covid-19 outbreak, getting paid for certain services remains a challenge.

VNSNY is seeking Congress' help with reimbursement so it and other home health agencies can provide more telehealth services, which can help them take on high volumes of patients and reduce virus spread.

"The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently lifted certain regulatory burdens for home health agencies in the fight against Covid-19," VNSNY said in a statement provided to *Crain's*. "However, while virtually all other provider groups have been granted authority by CMS to perform and be reimbursed by Medicare for telehealth services the same as in-person visits, CMS lacks congressional authority to allow home health agencies to do the same."

Annie Miyazaki-Grant, chief compliance and privacy officer at VNSNY, said that, currently, traditional Medicare is not reimbursing for telehealth services. "We are trying to negotiate a rate with our close to 30 managed care payors, but this is a time-consuming and uncertain back and forth and they are not mandated by CMS to pay an adequate rate," she said. "Medicaid, which is a fraction of our business, is reimbursing at a lower rate."

Just last week VNSNY began accepting Covid-19 referrals from local hospitals.

"We want to do everything possible to alleviate the strain on the New York metro area's hospital system," Michael Bernstein, executive vice president and chief administrative officer at VNSNY, said at the time.

To that end, the organization has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in new technology and personal protective equipment.

In addition to the reimbursement issue for telehealth services, Terese Acampora, chief operating officer at MJHS Hospice and Home Care, said that home care providers are "struggling to obtain required paperwork to bill Medicare for home health services."

"We need written physician orders and a signed face to face form to bill Medicare for home health services," Acampora said. "We are finding that physicians are either redeployed at the hospitals or are overwhelmed with direct care needs of their patients. We need regulatory relief to support hospitals and physicians in making referrals to community-based services, so that safe and timely care can be provided for patients in their homes."

A new report from the National Association for Home Care and Hospice and the Partnership for Quality Home Healthcare also called for reducing regulatory barriers to allow home health care providers in hard-hit states, such as New York, to ease the burden of Covid-19 on hospitals and physician offices. —J.H.