

APRNs Awarded \$5.7 Million in Medicare Bonuses for High Quality/e-Prescribing

In April 2011¹ the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that bonuses were awarded to health professionals for their 2009 performance with respect to treating patients under Medicare Part B. In particular, 11,579 APRNs won \$4.5 million for high quality performance. An additional 4,141 awards totaling \$1.2 million were also announced for successful use of e-prescribing. In 2009 a total of 92,472 APRNs participated and directly billed Part B carriers for services provided to Medicare patients. Their total approved charges that year came to \$1.9 billion out of a total of \$117.9 billion in total approved charges from all Part B providers. The APRN share of Part B has increased annually, going from 1.2% in 2006 to 1.6% in 2009.

The quality bonuses derive from the Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS) implemented in 2007. Approximately 22 percent of the APRNs billing Part B provided information to CMS so they could be ranked with respect to quality. This is a slightly higher percentage than all other professionals participating in Part B (20.8%), although slightly lower compared to the 25% participation by physicians and DOs. One in eight APRNs treating Part B patients did win a quality award. The average award was \$389.34. The APRN awards ranged from less than one dollar up to \$8,593.99 (awarded to a nurse practitioner). APRNs represented 1.9% of total bonuses to all Part B providers.

| Specialty | # TIN/NPI | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Median | Total | % Total |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Certified Nurse Midwife | 50 | \$0.30 | \$323.57 | \$31.88 | \$9.34 | \$1,594.16 | 0.00% |
| Clinical Nurse Specialist | 98 | \$6.21 | \$1,799.68 | \$350.64 | \$241.35 | \$34,363.17 | 0.01% |
| CRNA | 6,417 | \$0.87 | \$3,120.81 | \$403.11 | \$317.23 | \$2,586,733.26 | 1.10% |
| Nurse Practitioner | 4,648 | \$0.21 | \$8,593.99 | \$376.19 | \$218.63 | \$1,748,515.85 | 0.75% |
| Registered Nurse | 366 | \$1.23 | \$6,038.02 | \$374.18 | \$207.10 | \$136,949.96 | 0.06% |
| TOTAL | 11,579 | \$0.21 | \$8,593.99 | \$389.34 | \$272.62 | \$4,508,156.40 | 1.92% |

Note: specialties for APRNs are determined through the “primary taxonomy” listed on their applications for a National Provider Identifier, required for participation in Medicare and Medicaid.² Although only APRNs are allowed to participate in Part B, 3960 of APRNs in Part B listed Registered Nurse as their primary taxonomy rather than their specific APRN role. For the purpose of the CMS bonus announcement those observations were grouped into a single RN category.

An incentive program to encourage electronic prescribing was mandated by Congress in the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA). For 2009 4,141 APRNs were awarded e-prescribing bonuses totaling \$1.2 million. (APRNs and other providers record their use of e-prescribing using a special code on their Medicare Part B claims). APRN awards ranged from less than one dollar up to a maximum of \$11,235.48. There was a single e-prescribing bonus awarded to a certified registered nurse anesthetist for \$3.73.

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<http://www.cms.gov/apps/media/press/release.asp?Counter=3937&intNumPerPage=10&checkDate=&checkKey=&srchType=1&numDays=3500&srchOpt=0&srchData=&keywordType=All&chkNewsType=1%2C+2%2C+3%2C+4%2C+5&intPage=&showAll=&pYear=&year=&desc=&cboOrder=date>

² [APRNs with a National Provider Identifier \[PDF\]](#)

Table 2. 2009 eRx Distribution of Incentives by Specialty

| Specialty | # TIN/NPI Qualifying for Incentive | Incentive Amount | | | | | Percent of National Total |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Median | Total | |
| Certified Nurse Midwife | 71 | \$0.46 | \$102.47 | \$18.46 | \$8.92 | \$1,310.36 | 0.00% |
| Clinical Nurse Specialist | 73 | \$2.61 | \$1,991.51 | \$358.06 | \$165.89 | \$26,138.40 | 0.02% |
| CRNA | 1 | \$3.73 | \$3.73 | \$3.73 | \$3.73 | \$3.73 | 0.00% |
| Nurse Practitioner | 3,888 | \$0.31 | \$9,180.64 | \$285.76 | \$84.22 | \$1,111,018.38 | 0.75% |
| Registered Nurse | 108 | \$0.30 | \$11,235.48 | \$567.64 | \$143.20 | \$61,304.90 | 0.04% |
| TOTAL | 4,141 | \$0.30 | \$11,235.48 | \$289.73 | \$83.50 | \$1,199,775.77 | 0.81% |

While the APRN share of quality bonuses was somewhat higher than their share of total approved charges, the APRN share of e-prescribing bonuses was much lower, 0.81%. (For comparison purposes, the APRN share of Medicare total approved charges for level 3 follow-up office visits in 2009 was 2.1%. That particular visit type is the most common primary care service billed to Medicare and helps form the trigger for identifying professionals whose claims are reviewed for e-prescribing.) This suggests that APRNs' prescribing patterns may not be comparable to those of physicians—the backdrop for the CMS assumptions for implementing the penalty phase of MIPPA.³

Thanks go to the CMS staff and data contractors for the additional disaggregation of the awards data for each of the four APRN roles. Some of these data had not been separately published in the original CMS report.

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³ [Notice to Nurse Practitioners Who Directly Bill Part B for Treating Medicare Patients \[pdf\]](#)