

1111 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
703 684 2782
703 684 7343 fax
www.apta.org

A Message From APTA's President and the Chair of the Alternative Payment System Task Force

APTA's goal is to reform payment for outpatient physical therapy services to improve quality of care, recognize and promote the clinical judgment of the physical therapist, articulate the value of physical therapist services to the public and payers, and provide policymakers and payers with an accurate payment system that ensures the integrity of medically necessary physical therapist services. To achieve these goals, APTA developed a proposed model for payment for outpatient physical therapy services called the alternative payment system (APS).

In March 2012, the developmental draft of the APS was made available for members to review, followed by a member survey for comment and feedback. Three surveys were distributed in spring 2012, including a quantitative and qualitative survey for APTA members and stakeholders. Survey questions addressed the severity/intensity framework as a basis for payment, the appropriate unit on which to base payment, the proposed evaluation levels, the examination and intervention levels, overall value of the proposed system, supplemental support needed to implement the system, and the effectiveness of the APS in reflecting the clinical judgment of the physical therapist. An executive summary and final report can be [found here](#).

In July 2012, the Alternative Payment System (APS) Task Force was created and charged with further development, refinement, and implementation strategy of an APS for physical therapy services for consideration by the Board of Directors. The APS Task Force is instrumental in developing additional clinical vignettes to assist in increasing the clarity of the model and decreasing any unwarranted variations of practice in appropriately classifying patients within the model.

There has been significant progress with the APS. First, the name of the model changed from Alternative Payment System to the Physical Therapy Classification and Payment System (PTCPS). Alternative Payment System was originally the name chosen due to a primary objective to have this payment model serve as the alternative payment methodology as called for in the Balanced Budget Act (BBA) of 1997 to replace the arbitrary therapy cap on outpatient physical therapy services under Medicare. The new name, Physical Therapy Classification and Payment System, more accurately identifies the model's purpose and impact. In further refinement of the proposal, it is evident the severity/intensity framework is more than a payment system but requires a consistent framework for classifying patients into the model.

Second, the APS Task Force recommended that a comprehensive communication, public relations, education, and professional development plan be developed to maximize the opportunity for successful transition to a physical therapy classification and payment system. With recent payment changes and the need for alternatives to the therapy cap, it is imperative that APTA moves forward with a proposal and plan for implementation of a reformed payment methodology and associated reporting (coding) structure for outpatient physical therapy services. Communication to the profession and external stakeholders is pertinent to the success of this model. The task force believes it is critical for the APTA Board to support an effective communication, education, and professional development plan that will assist in communicating and measuring the relevance and impact of the PTCPS/APS.

Third, based on extensive feedback provided by APTA members, physical therapist leaders and stakeholders representing dozens of therapy groups, providers, and employers, APTA revised the PTCPS/APS developmental draft. This revised draft continues our effort to perfect a new classification and payment model for the delivery of physical therapy services. This draft will continue to be refined and developed as it goes through formal policy bodies. As the model continues to evolve, APTA members and stakeholders will be provided with updates and additional information.

APTA appreciates the time and effort that members put forth in reviewing and commenting on the proposed system to reform payment for outpatient physical therapist services. Ultimately, the alternative payment system will result in more fair, equitable payment for physical therapy services based on the needs of the patient and the expertise of the physical therapist. In addition, this system should promote high-quality, patient-centered care; demonstrate the value of physical therapist directed care; and enhance accountability and accuracy in payment to payers and patients. In its final form it will be a step toward creating a foundation for more equitable pay that facilitates the ability to measure the value of physical therapy in the health care environment.

Paul A. Rockar Jr, PT, DPT, MS
President, American Physical Therapy Association

Stephen M. Levine, PT, DPT, MSHA
Chair, Alternative Payment System Task Force

[3/7/13; advocacy@apta.org]