Sign-On to Support an Increase in Medicare Reimbursement for Facial Fillers

April 8, 2011

A prominent AIDS activist is asking people with HIV and the organizations that serve them to sign on to a letter asking the agency that sets reimbursement rates for Medicare to boost the rate it offers doctors to administer the facial fillers Sculptra (poly-L-lactic acid) and Radiesse (calcium hydroxylapatite).

Activists thought they'd won a major battle when the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced in March 2010 that the government health insurance program would begin covering the costs of Sculptra and Radiesse for people who have psychological trauma due to loss of fat in their faces, a condition known as lipoatrophy or facial wasting.

Sculptra and Radiesse are both temporary facial fillers that require touch-ups at least once per year for most people. The retail cost of a vial of Sculptra or Radiesse usually tops $500. As most people need a minimum of four to six treatments, and as doctors charge about $500 to $900 to inject the filler, a full course of treatment can easily exceed $4,000.

It's the latter point, reimbursement for the physician's fee, that has Nelson Vergel, a longtime AIDS activist from Houston, and other activists up in arms. Though doctors typically got $500 or more per treatment from their cash-paying patients to inject the facial fillers, Medicare is typically reimbursing only about $80. Obviously, the math doesn't add up.

"The cost of acquiring and administering the product is higher than the payment amount set by Medicare," he explains in the letter he's asking people to sign on to. "As a result, physicians are not accepting Medicare payments for this service, and patient access to these effective therapies remains quite limited at the current reimbursement rates."

To sign on to a letter demanding that Medicare increase its reimbursement rate for Sculptra and Radiesse treatment, click here before April 18.

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