

# MEDICARE PART A BULLETIN

March 13 , 1997

Hospital Medicare Bulletin H-76  
SNF Medicare Bulletin S-15

TO: All Medicare Hospital and Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) Providers

FROM: Andy DePirro, Director, Program Relations

SUBJECT: **MODIFIED BARIUM SWALLOW STUDIES**

**ATTENTION MEDICARE BUSINESS OFFICE:** Please distribute to all appropriate health care facility personnel.

The purpose of this bulletin is to ensure providers are aware that Modified Barium Swallow studies (CPT codes 70370, 70371, and 74230) are not covered when:

- Performed for screening purposes (i.e., services are not reasonable and/or medically necessary);
- Performed on a mobile basis; or
- Performed in the absence of physician supervision.

Modified barium swallow studies, or video esophagrams, aid in the evaluation of dysphagia. Based on a review of the services and the safety issue involved, coverage requirements were established and published to the provider community, along with various other Local Medical Review Policies (LMRPs), via General Medicare Bulletin G-261, dated January 20, 1997. [Reference: Medicare Part A Medical Policy Procedures, Policy No: ADYSPHRT, Dysphagia/ Swallowing Diagnosis and Therapy]

Modified barium swallow studies are considered medically reasonable and necessary when furnished for documented cases of dysphagia and motility disorders. These services are not covered when furnished for screening purposes or when furnished in settings where the safety and efficacy of the services can not be determined (i.e., on a mobile basis). The safety issues involved with studies performed on a mobile basis include the unshielded fluoroscopy and the potential lack of adequate personnel and equipment to respond to an emergency situation (e.g., aspiration of contrast).

Medicare regulations permit providers to furnish certain covered items and services to their patients under arrangements (e.g., skilled nursing facilities can make arrangements with portable x-ray suppliers to perform radiological exams for their patients). However, based on LMRP Policy No: ADYSPHRT, reimbursement is not allowed for modified barium swallow studies performed for screening purposes, on a mobile basis, or in the absence of physician supervision.

Providers entering into arrangements to furnish modified barium swallow studies for screening purposes, studies performed on a mobile basis, or studies performed in the absence of physician supervision, will be held liable. Medical Policy may be applied to Medicare claims on either a pre-

payment or post-payment basis, and Medicare participating providers are accountable for compliance with published policy application. Therefore, in the event of “overpayments,” all Medicare payments will be subject to recovery. In other words, if a provider receives payment for modified barium swallows under these circumstances, the Medicare reimbursement may be recovered at a future date.

Questions regarding this bulletin may be addressed to the Medicare Part A Customer Service Department by calling (904)355-8899.