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SGR, ICD-10 Delay Ready To Be Signed Into Law

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By [David Pittman](#), Washington Correspondent,
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WASHINGTON -- The Senate voted Monday evening to delay scheduled cuts in physician payments under Medicare and move the switch to ICD-10 billing codes to October 2015.

The chamber passed a bill that [delays by 12 months pending reimbursement cuts](#) under Medicare's sustainable growth rate (SGR) payment formula. Physicians were to face 24% cuts in Medicare payments starting Tuesday unless Congress acted.

[The House passed the same legislation last week](#), despite strong opposition from organized medicine [which has formed a unified front, clamoring for a permanent SGR repeal](#). The bill delaying the SGR's cuts and ICD-10 implementation is expected to be signed into law by President Obama.

Congress had been working on a permanent SGR repeal but was unable to come up with a way to pay for the bill. Complicating the issue was the early retirement of Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who chaired the committee that oversaw Medicare.

A long list of physician groups -- including the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, the American College of Surgeons, and the Alliance of Specialty Medicine -- opposed the 12-month SGR patch, saying it would [derail efforts to permanently kill the SGR](#).

Stuck in political strife, doctor groups are calling lawmakers' bluff, saying they are willing to take the 24% cuts under the SGR. This will likely force some practices to close down or stop seeing Medicare patients, and then force Congress to make a decision on how to pay for a full repeal.

But the bill the Senate passed Monday does more than simply delay the SGR's planned cuts, including:

- Delays till Oct. 1, 2015, the switch to ICD-10
- Provides a 0.5% Medicare pay bump over that 12-month period
- Revalues certain physician payment codes
- Creates a program designed to promote proper use of diagnostic tests and treatments and discourage their overuse
- Authorizes a multistate pilot program designed to raise standards for mental health services and improve integration of care

The legislation also delays a requirement for hospitals to comply with the "[two-midnight](#)" rule for inpatient reimbursement, and pushes back [recovery audits of allegedly unnecessary claims](#) until March 2015.

Monday's patch is the 17th patch to the ill-designed SGR formula.

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