



**Medicare : excessive payments for medical supplies
continue despite improvements : report to the
Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on
Labor, ... on Appropriations, United States Senate**

United States. General Accounting Office

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Pursuant to a congressional request, GAO reviewed Medicare payments for medical supplies, focusing on the: (1) circumstances surrounding payments for unusually high surgical dressing claims; and (2) adequacy of Medicare's internal controls to prevent paying such claims.

GAO found that: (1) although the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has eliminated medical suppliers' ability to select contractors with the highest payment rates, unwarranted expenditures still persist; (2) reasons for the unwarranted expenditures include inadequate systematic payment controls and noncompetitive payment rates for surgical dressings; (3) many Medicare contractors lack itemized bills, fail to automatically review high-dollar claims for newly covered surgical dressings, and lack a systematic method for detecting duplicate bills submitted to different types of Medicare carriers; (4) Medicare payment rates for new surgical dressings and other medical supplies are considerably higher than wholesale and retail prices; (5) HCFA could curtail these overpayments by establishing procedures to require itemized claims, preventing duplicate payments to Medicare suppliers, and identifying high-dollar, high-volume claims that should be reviewed before payment; (6) the initiative will provide comprehensive national payment data that will allow HCFA and its contractors to detect inappropriate billing and overutilization; and (7) HCFA needs legislative authority to set competitive payment rates that are favorable for high-volume purchasers.

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