



For Immediate Release

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Only Seven Days Left!

**Businesses in Healthcare Support Public Health and Secure Competitive Advantages by
Registering to Use ABC Codes in HIPAA Transactions**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. March 10, 2003. Thousands of health industry businesses and practitioners have taken a step toward improved public health, business efficiencies and socioeconomic development by registering to use ABC codes for integrative healthcare. Others have less than seven days to secure rights to use these codes in HIPAA transactions and meet a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) registration deadline of March 16, 2003.

ABC codes fill gaps and balance the medical orientation in older code sets that became national standards under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). Many coding experts believe all healthcare codes should be issued objectively and should function like universal product codes (UPCs or bar codes) in the grocery industry, to support more scientific and efficient research, management and commerce. They suggest that limitations in the nation's CPT Category I and HCPCS Level II code sets may be costing thousands of lives and billions of dollars in lost health industry efficiencies each year.

ABC codes were designed for HIPAA compliance and objectively describe alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare interventions. The codes meet congressional mandates under HIPAA; support comparisons of the economic and health outcomes of conventional, complementary and alternative care; and ensure health policy decisions can be based on a complete and accurate picture of the care delivered in the U.S.

To establish ABC codes as a national standard under HIPAA, the code set's developers spent more than half a decade following the directives of the federal government and its advisory committees. Noting delays in the government's ABC code set evaluation and HIPAA implementation process and the reported gaps in the older HIPAA code sets, HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson authorized commercial use and evaluation of ABC codes in HIPAA transactions. This action was permitted under a section of HIPAA, 45 CFR 162.940, that anticipated the medical code sets might need to be refined or replaced over time.

Secretary Thompson called for formal registration of potential code set users by March 16, 2003, and specified that those that did not register by March 16, 2003, would be locked out of using ABC codes in HIPAA transactions for two years. He anticipated evidence collected by the code set developers over that period would support a timely, transparent and objective decision on the value of ABC codes as a HIPAA standard.

So far, registrations are in the thousands and include a broad range of health industry stakeholders including:



- software application developers and other information technology companies;
- administrative and claims-related businesses;
- Medicare/Medicaid and private health plans;
- provider organizations such as hospital systems and subacute care facilities;
- conventional, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners;
- government agencies and institutes;
- fully and self-insured employers; and
- academic institutions with CAM programs.

Registration for using ABC codes is free at www.alternativelink.com and takes less than ten minutes. It includes an opinion poll that fulfills registrant obligations under the special regulation that made ABC codes commercially available under HIPAA. Once enrolled, registrants can opt in or out of code set use and evaluation, as they see fit.

ABC codes are maintained by The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare, a non-profit organization, and Alternative Link, a privately held New Mexico company.

The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (www.fihc.org) manages information on the characteristics and outcomes of care to help health industry organizations and practitioners make rational decisions that improve public health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development.

Alternative Link (www.alternativelink.com) delivers information products and consulting services that help health industry organizations and practitioners improve public health, business efficiencies and socioeconomic development.

Individuals and organizations can secure rights to use ABC codes in HIPAA transactions by registering at www.alternativelink.com by March 16, 2003.