



YOUR CODING COMPANY FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTHCARE

For Immediate Release

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**REGISTRATION DEADLINE NEARS FOR RIGHTS TO USE ABC CODES IN HIPAA
TRANSACTIONS FOR COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND NURSING**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. February 24, 2003. Healthcare stakeholders have less than three weeks to secure rights to use Advanced Billing Concept or ABC codes in HIPAA transactions, according to the organizations that develop and update these breakthrough codes.

ABC codes characterize alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare practices. Maintained by The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (FIHC), a non-profit organization, and Alternative Link (The Link), a privately-held New Mexico company, the codes were designed to plug gaps in older code sets controlled by the American Medical Association (AMA) and the federal government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

"Now that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has approved the use and evaluation of ABC codes, the next step for organizations and practitioners interested in using them is to register before the HHS deadline of March, 16, 2003," says Synthia Molina, CEO of Alternative Link. The registration form is available at www.alternativelink.com.

"The newer code set offers design, development and oversight improvements needed to enhance public health and business efficiencies," says Melinna Giannini, a coding expert and FIHC board member. "ABC codes are used in combination with the AMA's CPT codes and CMS' HCPCS Level II codes, and they fit into the same data fields, software applications, information systems and business processes. The codes work like universal product codes (UPCs) or bar codes in the retail industry to support research, management and commerce."

"ABC codes will help the industry better manage care, claims and outcomes for the expanded healthcare services today's consumers demand," notes Ms. Molina. "HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson approved the use and evaluation of ABC codes as a proposed modification to the HIPAA standards. So far, HHS remains firm about the registration cut-off date of Sunday, March 16, 2003, to 'opt in' under this special HIPAA exception. For this reason, those who don't enroll now will be "locked out" of using ABC codes for e-commerce over the next two years. Immediate enrollment is essential. Fortunately, it's also easy."

“What the HIPAA exception does is allow for expanded studies of the costs and benefits of ABC codes when used in electronic commerce,” explains Ms. Giannini. “HIPAA stands for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.” The Act requires that the entire healthcare industry communicate using the same transaction formats and code sets to support electronic commerce and administrative simplification. ABC codes were designed to meet HIPAA requirements and allow for more precise and efficient communication about the administration, financing and delivery of integrative healthcare products and services.

“The use of ABC codes in HIPAA transactions does not guarantee payment for alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare practices, but code use will lead to more rational coverage and reimbursement decisions based on the relative cost-effectiveness of different approaches to care,” adds Ms. Molina. ABC codes support comparisons of the economic and health outcomes of conventional, complementary and alternative care.

Ms. Molina also predicts that ABC codes will result in improved healthcare access, quality and cost-management, as policymakers get a more complete and accurate picture of U.S. healthcare. She notes that the codes are recognized by influential healthcare organizations such as the American Nurses Association, the American Association of Oriental Medicine, the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance, the World Chiropractic Alliance, the American Massage Therapy Association, the Midwives Alliance of North America and Citizens for Midwifery.

The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (www.fihc.org) delivers insight, competencies and tools needed to support rational health, healthcare and health policy decisions. FIHC focuses on collecting, compiling and disseminating information on the characteristics and outcomes of care to improve public health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development.

Alternative Link (www.alternativelink.com) delivers information products and consulting services that help healthcare pioneers lead emerging markets. The company focuses on intelligence-driven infrastructure and analytical solutions that protect and enhance public access to health-promoting and cost-effective healthcare interventions.

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