

CMS PUSHES BACK MANDATORY RADIATION ONCOLOGY MODEL TO JULY 2021

CMS Administrator Seema Verma announced on October 21st that, after listening to stakeholder feedback, the agency will delay the mandatory radiation oncology demonstration until July 1, 2021, giving providers an extra six months before the model goes into effect.

"The CMS team & I have listened to the feedback from ASTRO & the radiation oncology community regarding the start date of the new Radiation Oncology Model, and understand that more time is needed to prepare," Verma tweeted. "The Radiation Oncology Model is an important part of our strategy to strengthen Medicare and improve cancer care for patients across our country, so we intend to delay the model until July 2021 through upcoming rule-making," she continued.

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) praised CMS' decision. Theodore DeWeese, chair of the ASTRO Board of Directors, said, "This change is an important recognition of the radiation oncology community's concerns, and we are pleased and thankful that Administrator Verma listened to the needs of our member radiation oncology practices during these challenging times.

The radiation oncology demonstration will provide bundled payments for a 90-day episode of care to certain radiotherapy providers and suppliers furnishing radiotherapy for: anal cancer, bladder cancer, bone metastases, brain metastases, breast cancer, cervical cancer, CNS tumors, colorectal cancer, head and neck cancer, liver cancer, lung cancer, lymphoma, pancreatic cancer, prostate cancer, upper gastrointestinal cancer and uterine cancer.

CMS released the final version of the demonstration in September, and oncologists immediately vowed to go to Congress if the agency didn't push back its plans to start the demo in January. Radiation oncologists and other physician groups wrote to CMS asking the agency to push back the mandatory demo to January 2022, or at the earliest, next July, in part because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on outpatient services.