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**With 72 Hours Remaining to HHS Registration Deadline,  
Health Industry Associations, Media and Businesses Rally**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. March 13, 2003. Health industry associations, media and businesses are redoubling efforts to reach constituents before a March 16, 2003, registration deadline, to ensure they secure rights to use ABC codes in HIPAA transactions.

All health industry participants considering commercial use or evaluation of ABC codes in HIPAA transactions over the next two years must officially register as users or lose rights to code set use, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate issued earlier this year. Registration is free at [www.alternativelink.com](http://www.alternativelink.com), takes less than ten minutes and carries no obligations. Once enrolled, registrants can opt in or out of code set use, as they see fit.

As thousands of organizations and practitioners across the healthcare continuum have registered to gain the competitive advantages offered by the new code set, the vast majority have noted the value they believe these codes offer the nation by advancing public health and industry efficiencies.

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). The codes objectively describe alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare interventions. They 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 U.S. healthcare.

Until HHS authorized use of ABC codes under the HIPAA regulations (45 CFR 162.940), the nation's government-sanctioned coding focused on the practices of conventional physicians. As a result, healthcare research, management and commerce have favored Western medical practices delivered by these physicians. Medical coding has failed to capture complete and accurate data on the care delivered by more than 80% of the country's healthcare practitioners, many of whom follow wellness-based rather than disease-based models of care.

As an unbiased tool, billing codes should support commerce in a way that allows free market forces to determine which products and services deliver the greatest value. Without such coding, many promising healthcare practices cannot gain access to the marketplace, possibly resulting in unnecessarily high morbidity and mortality rates and health insurance premiums.



For this reason, registrations for ABC code set use are already in the thousands, and users and registrants include a broad range of health industry stakeholders such as:

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

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](http://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](http://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](http://www.alternativelink.com) by March 16, 2003. Detailed information about the ABC code set is available at the same web site. ABC coding experts can be reached 505.875.0001 (Mountain Time). Call volume is heavy.

Confirmation of the HHS requirement for ABC code set evaluator and user registration can be obtained at 410.786.4160 (Eastern Time) through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Transactions and Code Sets Enforcement Office. Detailed information about the ABC code set and the federal government's HIPAA code set evaluation and naming process is available in April 10-11, May 29-30, September 25-26, December 10-11 and January 29-30 transcripts and downloads from the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics at [www.ncvhs.hhs.gov](http://www.ncvhs.hhs.gov).