



**For Immediate Release**

**For more information, please visit  
[www.alternativelink.com](http://www.alternativelink.com), or contact  
[cheri.dunkleberger@alternativelink.com](mailto:cheri.dunkleberger@alternativelink.com)**

**THOUSANDS TO PARTNER TO SUPPORT ABC CODING IN HIPAA TRANSACTIONS  
FOR ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, NURSING AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTHCARE**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. May 6, 2003. Thousands of health industry participants are establishing agreements to facilitate electronic commerce for alternative medicine, nursing and other forms of integrative healthcare. Interest in these agreements—referred to as ABC “handshakes”—grew dramatically as HIPAA covered entities recognized the need to ensure registration of their trading partners, business associates and vendors in a broad based two-year demonstration program for ABC codes. The demonstration program, authorized by HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson this past January, allows for the commercial use and cost-benefit assessment of ABC codes in qualified HIPAA transactions across healthcare settings.

ABC codes are developed and maintained by Alternative Link (The Link), a privately held New Mexico company, and The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (FIHC), a non-profit organization. The codes support and fill gaps in the American Medical Association’s *Current Procedural Terminology* (CPT codes) and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ *Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System* (HCPCS Level II codes). ABC, CPT and HCPCS II codes fit into the same insurance billing forms, data fields, software applications, information systems and business processes. In combination, the codes support direct comparisons between the economic and health outcomes of conventional, complementary and alternative medicine.

The ABC coding and electronic commerce agreements reflect growing interest in evidence-based medicine and integrative healthcare as potential solutions to the U.S. healthcare crisis. “Some experts believe the industry needs to identify best practices among competing approaches to care if we’re ever to improve healthcare access, quality and cost-management,” explains Synthia Molina, CEO of The Link. “They expect ABC codes to support a more scientific approach to health policy decision making. This will allow health industry stakeholders to identify the most cost-effective interventions available—insight that could help slow escalating healthcare premiums and boost economic growth.” Both ABC codes and ABC handshakes were designed to help reach these endpoints.

Over ten thousand organizations and practitioners in the traditional healthcare arena have already positioned themselves to support research, management and commerce using ABC codes. These include Medicare Plus Choice plans, Medicaid programs, market-leading commercial health plans, third party administrators, conventional and specialty preferred provider organizations, integrated delivery networks and hospital systems, health information technology developers, academic research centers and medical schools, dozens of categories of healthcare practitioners and others.

In the property and casualty (P&C) arena, Mitchell Medical, the premier provider of integrated medical bill review systems, has long-recognized the value of incorporating a comprehensive classification system that encompasses all specialties and services provided in its industry. Since alternative medicine providers make up a significant portion of services provided in the P&C setting, Mitchell has worked for years toward supporting the use of ABC codes in claims adjudication for personal injury cases. “ABC codes will deliver significant value in bill review operations,” notes a company spokesperson.



According to HHS, those entities that want to use and evaluate ABC codes in qualified HIPAA transactions must register at [www.alternativelink.com](http://www.alternativelink.com) and identify their desired ABC handshakes by midnight, Thursday, May 29, 2003. Those that do not register and identify handshakes by this cutoff date will lose rights to use and evaluate ABC codes in qualified HIPAA transactions on the October 16, 2003, HIPAA transaction and code set compliance date.

ABC codes are similar to universal product codes (UPCs or bar codes) in the grocery industry. Based on official nomenclature—rather than on technology and prevalence assessments by those in conventional medicine—ABC codes were designed to improve healthcare research, management and commerce. “The codes reflect the impartiality of UPCs and are being used to transmit and capture information on the financing, administration and delivery of integrative healthcare—consistent with HIPAA’s administrative simplification goals,” explains Melinna Giannini, Board Member of The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (FIHC), a non-profit organization that supports development of the ABC terminology that drives ABC coding. “ABC codes help to ensure that healthcare data reflects the practices of all healthcare practitioners and does not unduly favor the practices of conventional allopathic physicians.”

Until now, coding used to transmit and capture healthcare data leaned strongly toward conventional physician and disease-based models of care. Older medical code sets—overseen by the AMA and CMS—largely overlooked the care provided by more than 80% of the nation’s healthcare providers. Most uncoded healthcare products and services were delivered by alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare practitioners. These providers tended to support wellness-based approaches to care. As their approaches are finally documented through use of ABC codes, better health and medical policies may result. Decision-makers may finally gain a complete and accurate picture of what does and does not work.

The Link ([www.alternativelink.com](http://www.alternativelink.com)) provides information products and consulting services that help health-promoting organizations and practitioners finance, administer and deliver cost-effective care that improves individual health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development.

FIHC ([www.fihc.org](http://www.fihc.org)) manages information on the characteristics and outcomes of care to help health-promoting organizations and practitioners make rational decisions that improve individual health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development.

Mitchell Medical, a division of industry standard-setting Mitchell International ([www.mitchell.com](http://www.mitchell.com)), provides the property and casualty (P&C) insurance market with technology, database and service solutions that enable clients to process medical claims in a timely, accurate and fair manner. For nearly two decades, Mitchell has delivered high-quality products and services to auto insurance carriers, service providers and third party administrators to support analysis and repricing of first- and third-party provider and hospital bills. Mitchell Medical currently serves several of the Top 5 automotive P&C companies and many of the Top 20.

An explanation of the official status of ABC codes can be obtained at 410.786.4160 (Eastern Time) through the CMS Office of HIPAA Standards. Transcripts and downloads from the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics’ review of ABC codes are available at [www.ncvhs.hhs.gov](http://www.ncvhs.hhs.gov) for the April 10-11<sup>th</sup>, May 29-30<sup>th</sup>, September 25-26<sup>th</sup> and December 10-11<sup>th</sup> hearings of 2002, as well as the January 29-30<sup>th</sup> and March 25-26<sup>th</sup> hearings of 2003.

ABC coding experts can be reached by emailing [userregistration@alternativelink.com](mailto:userregistration@alternativelink.com).