

limited number of medications. The EMT-Paramedic is defined as possessing the qualifications of the EMT-Intermediate and also, in accordance with State and local laws, as having enhanced skills that include being able to administer additional interventions and medications.

*Basic life support (BLS)* means transportation by ground ambulance vehicle and medically necessary supplies and services, plus the provision of BLS ambulance services. The ambulance must be staffed by an individual who is qualified in accordance with State and local laws as an emergency medical technician-basic (EMT-Basic). These laws may vary from State to State. For example, only in some States is an EMT-Basic permitted to operate limited equipment on board the vehicle, assist more qualified personnel in performing assessments and interventions, and establish a peripheral intravenous (IV) line.

*Conversion factor (CF)* is the dollar amount established by CMS that is multiplied by relative value units to produce ground ambulance service base rates.

*Emergency response* means responding immediately at the BLS or ALS1 level of service to a 911 call or the equivalent in areas without a 911 call system. An immediate response is one in which the ambulance entity begins as quickly as possible to take the steps necessary to respond to the call.

*Fixed wing air ambulance (FW)* means transportation by a fixed wing aircraft that is certified as a fixed wing air ambulance and such services and supplies as may be medically necessary.

*Geographic adjustment factor (GAF)* means the practice expense (PE) portion of the geographic practice cost index (GPCI) from the physician fee schedule as applied to a percentage of the base rate. For ground ambulance services, the PE portion of the GPCI is applied to 70 percent of the base rate for each level of service. For air ambulance services, the PE portion of the GPCI is applied to 50 percent of the applicable base rate.

*Goldsmith modification* means the recognition of rural areas within certain Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas wherein a census tract is deemed

to be rural when located within a large metropolitan county of at least 1,225 square miles, but is so isolated from the metropolitan core of that county by distance or physical features as to be more rural than urban in character.

*Loaded mileage* means the number of miles the Medicare beneficiary is transported in the ambulance vehicle.

*Paramedic ALS intercept (PI)* means EMT-Paramedic services furnished by an entity that does not furnish the ground ambulance transport, provided the services meet the requirements specified in §410.40(c) of this chapter.

*Point of pick-up* means the location of the beneficiary at the time he or she is placed on board the ambulance.

*Relative value units (RVUs)* means a value assigned to a ground ambulance service.

*Rotary wing air ambulance (RW)* means transportation by a helicopter that is certified as an ambulance and such services and supplies as may be medically necessary.

*Rural adjustment factor (RAF)* means an adjustment applied to the base payment rate when the point of pick-up is located in a rural area.

*Rural area* means an area located outside a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), or, in New England, a New England County Metropolitan Area (NECMA), or an area within an MSA or NECMA that is identified as rural by the Goldsmith modification.

*Specialty care transport (SCT)* means interfacility transportation of a critically injured or ill beneficiary by a ground ambulance vehicle, including medically necessary supplies and services, at a level of service beyond the scope of the EMT-Paramedic. SCT is necessary when a beneficiary's condition requires ongoing care that must be furnished by one or more health professionals in an appropriate specialty area, for example, nursing, emergency medicine, respiratory care, cardiovascular care, or a paramedic with additional training.

[67 FR 9132, Feb. 27, 2002, as amended at 68 FR 67693, Dec. 5, 2003]

#### §414.610 Basis of payment.

(a) *Method of payment.* Medicare payment for ambulance services is based on the lesser of the actual charge or

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the applicable fee schedule amount. The fee schedule payment for ambulance services equals a base rate for the level of service plus payment for mileage and applicable adjustment factors. Except for services furnished by certain critical access hospitals or entities owned and operated by them, as described in §413.70(b) of this chapter, all ambulance services are paid under the fee schedule specified in this subpart (regardless of the vehicle furnishing the service).

(b) *Mandatory assignment.* Effective with implementation of the ambulance fee schedule described in §414.601 (that is, for services furnished on or after April 1, 2002), all payments made for ambulance services are made only on an assignment-related basis. Ambulance suppliers must accept the Medicare allowed charge as payment in full and may not bill or collect from the beneficiary any amount other than the unmet Part B deductible and Part B coinsurance amounts. Violations of this requirement may subject the provider or supplier to sanctions, as provided by law (part 402 of this chapter).

(c) *Formula for computation of payment amounts.* The fee schedule payment amount for ambulance services is computed according to the following provisions:

(1) *Ground ambulance service levels.* The CF is multiplied by the applicable RVUs for each level of service to produce a service-level base rate. For services furnished during the period July 1, 2004 through December 31, 2006, ambulance services originating in urban areas (both base rate and mileage) are paid based on a rate that is one percent higher than otherwise is applicable under this section, and ambulance services originating in rural areas (both base rate and mileage) are paid based on a rate that is two percent higher than otherwise is applicable under this section. The service-level base rate is then adjusted by the GAF. Compare this amount to the actual charge. The lesser of the actual charge or the GAF adjusted base rate amount is added to the lesser of the actual mileage charges or the payment rate per mile, multiplied by the number of miles that the beneficiary was transported. When applicable, the appro-

appropriate RAF is applied to the ground mileage rate to determine the appropriate payment rates. The RVU scale for the ambulance fee schedule is as follows:

Service level	Relative value units (RVUs)
BLS .....	1.00
BLS-Emergency .....	1.60
ALS1 .....	1.20
ALS1-Emergency .....	1.90
ALS2 .....	2.75
SCT .....	3.25
PI .....	1.75

(2) *Air ambulance service levels.* The base payment rate for the applicable type of air ambulance service is adjusted by the GAF and, when applicable, by the appropriate RAF to determine the amount of payment. Air ambulance services have no CF or RVUs. This amount is compared to the actual charge. The lesser of the charge or the adjusted GAF rate amount is added to the payment rate per mile, multiplied by the number of miles that the beneficiary was transported. When applicable, the appropriate RAF is also applied to the air mileage rate.

(3) *Loaded mileage.* Payment is based on loaded miles. Payment for air mileage is based on loaded miles flown as expressed in statute miles. There are three mileage payment rates: a rate for FW services, a rate for RW services, and a rate for all levels of ground transportation.

(4) *Geographic adjustment factor (GAF).* For ground ambulance services, the PE portion of the GPCI from the physician fee schedule is applied to 70 percent of the base rate for ground ambulance services. For air ambulance services, the PE portion of the physician fee schedule GPCI is applied to 50 percent of the base rate for air ambulance services.

(5) *Rural adjustment factor (RAF).* (i) For ground ambulance services where the point of pickup is in a rural area, the mileage rate is increased by 50 percent for each of the first 17 miles and by 25 percent for miles 18 through 50. The standard mileage rate applies to every mile over 50 miles. For air ambulance services where the point of pickup is in a rural area, the total payment is increased by 50 percent; that is, the

rural adjustment factor applies to the sum of the base rate and the mileage rate.

(ii) For services furnished during the period July 1, 2004 through December 31, 2009, the payment amount for the ground ambulance base rate is increased by 22.6 percent where the point of pickup is in a rural area determined to be in the lowest 25 percent of rural population arrayed by population density. The amount of this increase is based on CMS's estimate of the ratio of the average cost per trip for the rural areas in the lowest quartile of population compared to the average cost per trip for the rural areas in the highest quartile of population. In making this estimate, CMS may use data provided by the GAO.

(6) *Multiple patients.* The allowable amount per beneficiary for a single ambulance transport when more than one patient is transported simultaneously is based on the total number of patients (both Medicare and non-Medicare) on board. If two patients are transported simultaneously, then the payment allowance for the beneficiary (or for each of them if both patients are beneficiaries) is equal to 75 percent of the service payment allowance applicable for the level of care furnished to the beneficiary, plus 50 percent of the applicable mileage payment allowance. If three or more patients are transported simultaneously, the payment allowance for the beneficiary (or each of them) is equal to 60 percent of the service payment allowance applicable for the level of care furnished to the beneficiary, plus the applicable mileage payment allowance divided by the number of patients on board.

(7) *Payment rate for mileage greater than 50 miles.* For services furnished during the period July 1, 2004 through December 31, 2008, each loaded ambulance mile greater than 50 (that is, miles 51 and greater) for ambulance transports originating in either urban areas or in rural areas are paid based on a rate that is 25 percent higher than otherwise is applicable under this section.

(d) *Payment.* Payment, in accordance with this subpart, represents payment in full (subject to applicable Medicare Part B deductible and coinsurance re-

quirements as described in subpart G of part 409 of this chapter or in subpart I of part 410 of this chapter) for all services, supplies, and other costs for an ambulance service furnished to a Medicare beneficiary. No direct payment will be made under this subpart if billing for the ambulance service is required to be consolidated with billing for another benefit for which payment may be made under this chapter.

(e) *Point of pick-up.* The zip code of the point of pick-up must be reported on each claim for ambulance services so that the correct GAF and RAF may be applied, as appropriate.

(f) *Updates.* The CF, the air ambulance base rates, and the mileage rates are updated annually by an inflation factor established by law. The inflation factor is based on the consumer price index for all urban consumers (CPI-U) (U.S. city average) for the 12-month period ending with June of the previous year.

(g) *Adjustments.* The Secretary will annually review rates and will adjust the CF and air ambulance rates if actual experience under the fee schedule is significantly different from the assumptions used to determine the initial CF and air ambulance rates. The CF and air ambulance rates will not be adjusted solely because of changes in the total number of ambulance transports.

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**§414.615 Transition to the ambulance fee schedule.**

The fee schedule for ambulance services will be phased in over 5 years beginning April 1, 2002. Subject to the first sentence in §414.610(a), payment for services furnished during the transition period is made based on a combination of the fee schedule payment for ambulance services and the amount the program would have paid absent the fee schedule for ambulance services, as follows:

(a) *2002 Payment.* For services furnished in 2002, the payment for the service component, the mileage component and, if applicable, the supply component is based on 80 percent of the