

Oct. 22, 2010

Given the new direction for the nation's health system, the AMA has developed *Health System Reform Insight* to help you understand the health system reform legislation and what it means to you and your patients.

Comparative effectiveness research: communicating CER findings to physicians

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently awarded funds to pilot new strategies to communicate the results of comparative effectiveness research (CER) rapidly and directly to physicians.

Academic detailing

Among the AHRQ awards was an \$11.7 million grant to Total Therapeutic Management to launch academic detailing, which entails hiring professionals to deliver unbiased research information to physicians and other prescribers.

When Congress considered legislation to specifically fund academic detailing grants, the AMA offered legislative principles that should guide such a program. The principles were modeled after surveying existing academic detailing initiatives around the country, including a proposed joint program developed by state medical societies.

According to the AMA's legislative principles, academic detailing should be a voluntary educational or professional development program for physicians designed to support and enhance quality of care for patients. It must not infringe on the clinical judgment of physicians, who are obligated to consider the individual needs of their



Oct. 27

The AMA will host "Understanding your Medicare choices: Preparing for the 2011 Medicare participation decision," a webinar at 7 p.m. Eastern time Oct. 27. The program will explain the three options physicians have with regard to Medicare—participation, nonparticipation, or opting out and privately contracting with patients—and spell out the advantages and disadvantages of each. [Register today.](#)

Nov. 13

[Register](#) for "Pathways to success: What physicians need to know about the coming revolution in payment practices," an AMA seminar being held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Eastern time Nov. 13 at the Marriott Grappone Conference Center in Concord, N.H.

Dec. 1

Medicare payments for physician services are scheduled to be cut by more than 23 percent.

Dec. 8

[Register](#) for "Pathways to success: What physicians need to know about the coming revolution in payment practices," an AMA seminar being held from 6 to 9 p.m. Central time Dec. 8 at the Marriott West Des Moines Hotel in West Des Moines, Iowa.

patients. Fundamentally, the primary goal of academic detailing is to improve care, not to control costs.

While the federal legislation to fund academic detailing grants never passed, AHRQ has used money appropriated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to pilot these communications. The AMA will monitor the AHRQ award for academic detailing to evaluate the involvement of practicing clinicians with relative expertise, as well as adherence to prohibitions on conflicts of interest.

CER and continuing education

Another award by AHRQ will support continuing education. Again, the AMA will carefully monitor this "pilot" effort and will urge the Obama administration to give priority to specialties and academic medical centers if similar future awards are made.

The largest awards made by AHRQ do not appear consistent with general principles related to academic detailing nor more broadly with AMA policy concerning CER. Specifically, two separate awards were made to a single entity that is not a continuing medical education provider, academic medical center, nonprofit entity or a specialty society. Rather, it's a public relations firm.

The firm Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide will establish a publicity center and regional dissemination centers. This raises concerns because public relations firms do not typically have the requisite clinical expertise and may in fact have significant conflict of interests to the extent they market and provide public relations services to medical product manufacturers.

CER holds promise to provide physicians with clinically relevant, actionable information they can use at the point of care to optimize their therapeutic decision-making, so long as certain safeguards are employed. Under the health system reform law, AHRQ will receive additional substantial funding to support the dissemination of CER findings. The law also specifies that AHRQ must consult with relevant medical and clinical associations when developing strategies for the dissemination and uptake of CER findings. The AMA will carefully monitor, provide feedback and offer recommendations to modify future calls for proposals.

Dec. 31

From mid-November through Dec. 31, physicians will have their annual opportunity to review and perhaps change their participation status with the Medicare program.



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