

December 2, 2010

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TOP STORIES

1. **Congress staves off Medicare cut that hurts seniors; one-year action needed this month**

The U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation on November 29 that provides a one-month reprieve from the 23 percent Medicare physician payment cut that was scheduled to take effect on December 1. Because the U.S. Senate already approved the bill by unanimous consent on November 18, it will now be sent to the White House to be signed into law. Physicians are still faced with a 25 percent Medicare cut on January 1.

"While this short-term delay helps ensure that physicians can continue to care for seniors for the next month, congressional action early in December to stop the cut for one year will inject stability into the Medicare program and ensure that Medicare delivers on its promise of health coverage for America's seniors," AMA President Cecil B. Wilson, MD, said. "It is crucial that Congress act well before the January 1 deadline so there are no disruptions in care for seniors."

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/congress-delays-medicare-cut.shtml> to read more from Dr. Wilson.

In addition, the AMA would like to thank all state and specialty medical societies for their participation in "White Coat Wednesday" on November 17. Capitol Hill offices were inundated with telephone calls from physicians and patients. The success of this grassroots effort demonstrates medicine's strength when we

all work together to deliver a strong, common message.

2. Physicians can talk Medicare options during tonight's webinar

The AMA will host the live webinar "Understanding your Medicare choices: Preparing for the 2011 Medicare participation decision" at 6:30 p.m. Eastern time tonight, December 2. The AMA originally held the program October 27 and is offering it again because of its overwhelming attendance and popularity among physicians.

During this program, physicians will learn about:

- The options they have—participation in Medicare, nonparticipation in Medicare or opting out of Medicare and privately contracting with patients
- The advantages and disadvantages of each option as well as payment calculations under each one
- Government-proposed 2011 Medicare physician payment policy changes

Visit <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=o0vb1hmijhzh> to learn more and register.

In addition, the AMA has prepared a kit to help physicians during the evaluation process. The kit, at <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/medicarekit>, includes the guide, "Know your options: Medicare participation guide," which contains a detailed explanation of the three options.

3. AMA applauds HHS adoption of NAIC medical-loss ratio recommendation

New regulations issued November 22 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) require health insurers to spend 80 to 85 percent of consumers' premiums on direct care for patients and efforts to improve care quality.

These regulations, known as the "medical-loss ratio" provisions of the Affordable Care Act, will make the health insurance marketplace more transparent and make it easier for consumers to purchase plans that provide better value for their money.

The AMA—working closely with the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC)—supports HHS's decision to adopt the NAIC recommendations in full and urges HHS to keep the health insurance industry from diverting premium dollars away from medical care.

"Patients deserve to get the maximum value from their health insurance premiums, and requiring that at least 80 percent of the patients' premium dollars be spent on medical care can accomplish this goal," said AMA President Cecil B. Wilson, MD. "We are pleased that HHS did not allow the health insurance industry to claim administrative expenses as medical losses, artificially inflate the medical-loss ratio or calculate their ratios at the national level."

Visit <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/11/20101122a.html> to learn more about the new regulations.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/naic-medical-loss.shtml> to view Dr. Wilson's full statement about the regulations.

4. New AMA survey finds insurer preauthorization policies impact patient care

Policies that require physicians to ask permission from a patient's insurance company before performing

a treatment negatively impact patient care, according to a new survey released November 22 by the AMA. This is the first national physician survey by the AMA to quantify the burden of insurers' preauthorization requirements for a growing list of routine tests, procedures and drugs.

"Intrusive managed care oversight programs that substitute corporate policy for physicians' clinical judgment can delay patient access to medically necessary care," AMA Immediate Past President J. James Rohack, MD, said. "According to the AMA survey, 78 percent of physicians believe insurers use preauthorization requirements for an unreasonable list of tests, procedures and drugs."

Preauthorization policies deliver costly bureaucratic hassles that take time from patient care. Physicians spend 20 hours per week on average just dealing with preauthorizations. And studies show that navigating the managed care maze costs physicians \$23.2 billion to \$31 billion a year.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/survey-insurer-preauthorization.shtml> to learn more about the survey.

FEDERATION NEWS

5. Colorado practices use data to improve patient care; learn more during AMA webinar

Find out how practices in Colorado used diabetes, asthma and prevention measures as a starting point to improve patient outcomes by redesigning and transforming care delivery during a free AMA webinar at noon Eastern time December 15.

"Using data to improve care: Case studies from Colorado"—part of the AMA-convened Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement™ (PCPI) "Quality in Action" webinar series—will include an overview of core principles and intervention strategies, case studies of how practices transformed their culture and achieved successful outcomes, key drivers that helped sustain their improvement and suggestions for interested adopters.

Colorado was one of the first states chosen to pilot the "Improving Performance in Practice" initiative developed through the American Board of Medical Specialties along with the Boards and Societies of Family Medicine, Internal Medicine and Pediatrics.

All physicians and other health care and quality improvement professionals interested in implementing improvement strategies along with measurement to transform care delivered in office practices are encouraged to participate.

Visit <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=5qwc8dkfi36a> to learn more and register for this free webinar.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/webinars-qualityinaction> to learn more about the PCPI's "Quality in Action" webinar series.

6. Cardiovascular research, clinical care issues to be explored during upcoming conference

Examine some of the critical issues facing the future of cardiovascular research and clinical care in science, business, education and policy during the conference "New Frontiers in Personalized Medicine: Cardiovascular Research and Clinical Care," which will be held January 6 at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Co-sponsored by the AMA, along with the Personalized Medicine Coalition, the American College of Cardiology, the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute and the Cheney Cardiovascular Institute at George Washington University, the event will give participants the opportunity to discuss personalized medicine's current and potential impact on patient outcomes, review emerging technologies and develop recommendations for next steps.

Visit <http://personalizedmedicinecoalition.org/events/cardiovascular2011> to learn more and register.

7. Register for annual meeting on prevention and quality

Hear about updates, innovations and new perspectives on such topics as clinical preventive and lifestyle medicine, prevention policy, public health practice and medical quality during the annual meeting of the American College of Preventive Medicine, February 16–19, 2011, in San Antonio.

Featured speakers include:

- David Katz, MD, director of the Prevention Research Center at Yale University School of Medicine
- Dean Ornish, MD, founder and president of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute and a clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco
- William Dietz, MD, director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Glenn Steele Jr., MD, president and chief executive officer of Geisinger Health System

Visit <http://www.preventivemedicine2011.org/agenda.html> to learn more and register.

PUBLIC HEALTH

8. AMA urges smokers to ask their doctor for help quitting

In light of the 35th annual Great American Smokeout on November 18, the AMA urged smokers to ask their physician for help to quit smoking. Smoking remains the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the United States and causes serious health effects, including increased risk for cancer as well as heart and lung disease.

“There is hope for smokers, though,” AMA Board of Trustees member Carl Sirio, MD, said in an AMA statement. “As soon as 24 hours after their last cigarette, smokers who quit begin to see health benefits. Just two weeks after quitting smoking, circulation improves and lung function increases.”

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/news/news/ama-urges-smokers-ask-doctor-for-help.shtml> to view Dr. Sirio's full statement.

As part of its Healthier Life Steps™ program, the AMA offers free online resources for physicians at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/public-health/promoting-healthy-lifestyles/healthier-life-steps-program/physicians-other-health.shtml> to help their patients quit smoking.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/tobacco> to learn more about the AMA's tobacco cessation efforts.

9. In *American Medical News*: Vaccination rates for adults drop below optimal levels

New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that not enough people ages 19 and older are immunized against preventable infectious diseases.

To bolster the rates, health professionals encourage physicians to regularly inform staff of new vaccine recommendations, educate adult patients about why the immunizations are needed, and provide opportunities for adults to get vaccinated at each office visit, *American Medical News* reports.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/amednews/2010/11/29/prsa1129.htm> to learn more in a November 29 *American Medical News* story.

10. What can we learn about patient safety from NASA?

Over the years, NASA has had well-publicized successes and failures. By applying these lessons learned from its own experiences, as well as those of other high-reliability organizations, NASA has made safety an integral part of its culture.

Physicians can join the AMA at 1 p.m. Eastern time on January 19 for a webinar featuring Gregg Bendrick, MD, chief medical officer at the NASA Dryden Flight Research Center, located at the Edwards Air Force Base in California. Dr. Bendrick’s presentation, “High-reliability safety: applications to health care,” will demonstrate how to apply to patient safety many of the lessons NASA has learned.

All physicians, nurses and other health professionals, as well as health professions students, educators and patient safety experts, are encouraged to participate. Cost is \$79 per site for AMA members and \$99 per site for nonmembers.

Visit <http://eo2.commpartners.com/users/ama/series.php?id=1118> to learn more and register.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

11. December 7 webinars help physicians prepare for audits

Physicians can join the AMA on December 7 for a 30-minute webinar that will explain how their practices can prepare for government and private payer audits. The webinar—“Could your practice be at risk for a payer audit?”—will be offered at noon, 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Eastern time.

Industry expert Frank Cohen—who has participated in and published numerous articles and studies, and has trained thousands of health care professionals on the techniques used to conduct comprehensive medical practice analyses—will discuss these audits and give a brief demonstration of the AMA’s Practice Analysis Tools for Healthcare (AMA PATH™), an affordable online tool that can help physicians assess their audit risk.

AMA PATH™ offers access to knowledge—typically associated with expensive consultants—that lets physicians see how their practice looks to auditors. Physicians can then implement process improvements to help safeguard their practice against payer audits. There will be time for questions following each of Dec. 7 presentations.

Visit <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=bbecyjpwmhux> to register for the noon Eastern time webinar; <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=d9q3tk748e8b> to register for the 1:30 p.m. Eastern time webinar; and <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=qdnw9tosjqng> to register for the 3 p.m. Eastern time webinar.

Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/amapath> to learn more about AMA PATH™.

12. Physicians should prepare now for January testing of version 5010 transactions

Beginning January 1—a little more than a month away—physician practices will need to be prepared to begin testing the version 5010 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act transactions with their trading partners, including payers and clearinghouses. External testing with physicians' trading partners is critical for ensuring that they are ready for the January 1, 2012, compliance date for sending and receiving only the version 5010 transactions.

To begin external testing with trading partners, practices need to have finished conducting an impact analysis, contacted their vendors and trading partner, undergone installation of the system's upgrades and conducted internal testing of their system.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Medicare Fee-for-Service program will be ready to test the version 5010 transactions this January. CMS has made it clear that the January 1, 2012, deadline for implementing the version 5010 transactions will not be extended. Missing this deadline puts physicians at risk for rejected transactions, denied claims and delayed reimbursement.

The AMA offers various resources to help physicians prepare their practice to implement version 5010 by the January 1, 2012, deadline. Visit <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/5010> and <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/icd-10> to access these resources and view a free archived webinar to help your practice prepare for these approaching deadlines.

13. New resource helps physicians design their practices to meet the needs of their geriatric patients, office staff

A new e-book from the AMA—"Geriatric Care by Design"—highlights the unique needs of a physician practice's aging patients through a design and practice management perspective. The e-book format features easy-to-implement ideas and templates that can help physicians make changes both big and small in their practices.

"Geriatric Care by Design" can help physicians successfully manage opportunities and challenges, such as accessibility issues, coordination of care and supportive office systems. Case studies and lessons learned from experts in both primary and specialty care provide information and clear insight on how to design an environment that meets the needs of physicians, patients and office staff.

Visit <http://amascb.pdn.ipublishcentral.com/product/geriatric-care-by-design> to learn more about "Geriatric Care by Design."

Visit <http://amascb.pdn.ipublishcentral.com> to view other e-book titles from the AMA.

14. Webinar details EHR quality reporting

A December 8 webinar will provide an overview of the electronic health record (EHR) incentive program requirements for clinical quality measures reporting for 2011. The webinar will:

- Explain how the EHR incentive program compares to other Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' incentive programs, such as ePrescribing and the physician quality reporting initiative

□ Identify additional informational resources regarding the program
Visit <https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/schedule/display.do?udc=uyze0468yt2h> to register today for the webinar, which will take place at 6 p.m. Eastern time December 8.

External links to Web sites and e-mail addresses are offered to provide readers with additional sources of news and information. The AMA is not responsible for the content contained in these external sources.

If you have any questions regarding this newsletter please send an e-mail to AMA.Federation.News@ama-assn.org or call (312) 464-4657.

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