

July 21, 2011

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TOP STORIES

1. Physicians commend 'Gang of Six' call for SGR repeal

The AMA and 16 medical specialty societies issued a statement July 20 in response to a U.S. Senate "Gang of Six" proposal for deficit reduction that included full repeal of the broken Medicare physician payment formula—the sustainable growth rate (SGR). In the statement, the physician organizations commend the "Gang of Six" for recognizing that a full repeal of the SGR must be included in deficit reduction legislation.

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,7j87,8u6,9t9z,a6f9>
to read the statement.

2. Proposed Medicare physician payment rule confirms cut for 2012

A proposed regulation issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

(CMS) verifies that unless Congress acts, Medicare physician payments will be slashed by 29.5 percent on Jan. 1. The rule is open for comment until Aug. 30.

In a statement about the proposed regulation, CMS Administrator Donald Berwick, MD, acknowledged that a cut "would have serious consequences" and expressed the Obama administration's determination to pass "a permanent SGR fix to solve this problem once and for all."

The rule provides no information about how this should be accomplished, but it does reassert last year's promise to look at potentially helpful changes in the Medicare Economic Index, which is used to calculate physician cost inflation.

In response to primary care physicians' continued concerns regarding payments for their services, the proposed rule calls on the AMA/Specialty Society RVS Update Committee to review 91 evaluation-and-management codes that CMS says may be undervalued and 70 high-volume, high-dollar services the agency believes may be overvalued.

The rule also would impose new payment cuts on advanced imaging services, modify the way geographic practice cost indexes, or GPCIs, are calculated and make the ePrescribing incentive program more flexible.

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,8klu,h3rs,9t9z,a6f9> to view the proposed rule.

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,e189,l4jk,9t9z,a6f9> to read more about this in AMA Wire.

3. HHS releases proposed new privacy rule; AMA to submit comments

A proposed rule issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would revise the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy rule.

The rule responds in part to requirements mandated under the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, which expands how HIPAA-covered entities—including physicians—account for patient health data that is shared, including the ability to detail who has accessed a patient's electronic health records.

The proposed rule seemingly goes beyond what is required by law and would pose significant burdens on physicians if finalized. For example, physicians would only have 30 days to respond to disclosure requests.

The AMA is reviewing the rule carefully and will be submitting comments to the Office of the Federal Register by the Aug. 1 deadline.

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,4tif,hhtg,9t9z,a6f9> to view the proposed rule.

FEDERATION NEWS

4. Judge orders Wisconsin to repay \$233 million to fund for injured patients

A Wisconsin circuit court judge entered an order this week requiring the state to pay more than \$233 million to Wisconsin's Injured Patients and Families Compensation Fund.

The order obligates the state to return the \$200 million taken, along with more than \$33 million in lost earnings and interest, by Oct. 1. The order is the final step in resolving all remaining issues following the Wisconsin Supreme Court's ruling a year ago that the state unlawfully took \$200 million from the fund, which is used to cover medical liability awards, in 2007 to help balance the state's budget.

The Wisconsin Medical Society (WMS) filed a lawsuit in October 2007 following enactment of legislation that took the money from the fund.

"We are extremely pleased that the state has agreed to make the Injured Patients and Families Compensation Fund whole in the next three months rather than extending the obligation into 2012," WMS President George M. Lange, MD, said. "The integrity of the fund and the stability of the state's medical liability system benefit all Wisconsin patients and physicians."

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,9kch,b362,9t9z,a6f9> to read more.

5. Pennsylvania physicians notch legislative victories

The Pennsylvania Medical Society (PAMED) and its allies won two important victories for physicians and patients when Gov. Tom Corbett signed two PAMED-supported bills into law earlier this month.

One is an HIV-testing bill, which updates the state's HIV law so it is consistent with recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The law takes effect Sept. 5; visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,i4kl,ajkk,9t9z,a6f9> to read more about it.

The other is the Fair Share Act, which modifies Pennsylvania's joint and several liability law. The law goes into effect Aug. 27; visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,1xpq,gqnf,9t9z,a6f9> to read more about it

Visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,iefp,jlil,9t9z,a6f9> to read more.

PUBLIC HEALTH

6. National study to determine how environment affects children's health

A groundbreaking national children's health study aims to follow 100,000 children from before birth to age 21 to learn how their environment influences their health, development and quality of life.

The National Children's Study will examine the effects of the environment, including such factors as air, water, diet, sound, family dynamics, genetics, and community and cultural influences on the growth, development and health implications on children across the United States. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—through the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are leading the study.

Physicians are encouraged to invite their patients to participate in the study.
Visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,6bap,k3fi,9t9z,a6f9> to read more about it.

7. New toolkit helps doctors educate patients about pneumococcal disease

Physicians now have new resources to help them ensure that their adult patients are immunized for pneumococcal disease.

Developed by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), the Professional Practice Toolkit contains a host of materials that physicians can use to educate patients about the importance of preventing pneumococcal disease, as well as tools to support their own vaccination efforts. Available in English and Spanish, the toolkit offers:

* Practice communications and ready-to-use resources to educate patients and

prompt them to talk about and consider all recommended adult vaccines.
* An immunization assessment form that helps patients understand their risk for pneumococcal disease and encourages them to ask about vaccination during their office visit.
* Materials for patients in populations affected by disease and immunization disparities.
* Tools for immunizers, including a pneumococcal disease fact sheet and a link to additional resources on the implementation of standing orders for adult immunization.

The AMA was part of the scientific committee that provided advice to the NFID as it developed the toolkit.

Visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,f1xp,lour,9t9z,a6f9> to access the toolkit.

Visit <http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,dgsx,ftj0,9t9z,a6f9> to read more about the toolkit in AMA Wire.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

8. Access online coding tools with ease on new AMA website

Physicians can view a comprehensive suite of authoritative medical coding and compliance resources on a new AMA website dedicated to online products: AMA Coding Online.

The new site – at www.amacodingonline.com – features the AMA’s best-selling products in all-new online formats, including CodeManager® Online: Standard, Professional and Elite versions. This comprehensive application provides the medical coding references that physicians need to ensure their offices are current and compliant with coding, billing and payment processes.

Users also can perform free CPT® code searches and obtain information about Medicare's relative value payment amount associated with the codes. Searches can be performed using five-digit CPT code numbers or key words in the code description.

Select titles are updated monthly and subscriptions can be purchased separately or together for seamless interaction. Learn more today about the products available, including the CPT Assistant® newsletter, CPT Changes, the Clinical Examples in Radiology newsletter and RBRVS DataManager.

9. In AMA MedEd Update: What’s the impact of new duty-hour regulations?

The more than 27,000 new first-year resident physicians who begin their training this month are the first to work under the new duty-hour regulations of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, which went into effect July 1. Under these guidelines, first-year residents are limited to 16-hour shifts.

How are teaching hospitals and residency programs adjusting to this new reality?

Read the premiere issue of AMA MedEd Update to learn more, and take the Quick Poll to voice your opinion.

Delivered free each month, AMA MedEd Update covers news and analysis for the continuum of medical education, including medical schools, graduate medical education, continuing physician professional development, and health care careers.

Visit

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,k4sf,aw4s,9t9z,a6f9> to view the premiere edition and to sign up for the newsletter.

10. Webinar examines rise in preterm deliveries

Physicians can learn about the challenges with managing late preterm births by viewing a free webinar, "Raising Awareness: Late Preterm Birth and Non-Medically Indicated Deliveries Prior to 39 Weeks."

Since 1990, there has been a growing incidence of late preterm births as well as non-medically indicated deliveries between 37 and 38 weeks' gestation. In 2007, 12.7 percent of births were preterm in the United States. Of these, late preterm births—those between 34 and 36 weeks' gestation—account for 70 percent of preterm births. Thus, in 2007 there were nearly 400,000 late preterm births in the United States, representing about 9 percent of the nation's live births.

The webinar, hosted by Medscape, features a panel discussion moderated by Catherine Spong, MD, chief of the pregnancy and perinatology branch at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Physicians can earn AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™ for viewing the program.

The webinar is an initiative of the National Child and Maternal Health Education

Program (NCMHE). The AMA is a member of the NCMHE's coordinating committee and

is represented by AMA Board of Trustees member Mary Anne McCaffree, MD. Visit the AMA's public health page at

<http://www.elabs10.com/ct.html?rtr=on&s=x8pbgr,lgol,2ke5,jxsf,kt9d,9t9z,a6f9> to access the webinar.

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