



TACKLING ISSUES

CMS joins AMA policy-making Interim meeting

PHYSICIAN-DELEGATES REPRESENTING the perspectives of more than 170 state and medical specialty societies gathered last November to shape AMA policy for the challenging, sometimes uncertain, days ahead.

The 545-plus delegates to the AMA Interim meeting considered more than 80 reports and resolutions. The three-day conference also featured multiple workshops and educational forums. Highlights included:

- “Phat Forum: The Physician’s Role in the Obesity Epidemic,” presented by the Forum on Medical Affairs, in joint sponsorship with the Oklahoma State Medical Association.
- “Don’t Give Your Discounts Away: The Unregulated Secondary Discount Market.” Panelists painted a bleak picture of how some health plan payers’ business practices are affecting reimbursement to physicians. Jeremy Lazurus, MD, vice speaker of the AMA House, described the AMA’s model state legislation for regulating the secondary market in physician discounts.
- Kick-off of the Medical Student National Service Project—“Covering the Uninsured and Protecting Access to Care.”



Casey Becker, CMS

CMS makes hospital rounds

As part of CMS’ ongoing outreach to the local medical community, CMS President Shastri Swaminathan recently addressed the medical staff of Saint Francis Hospital, Evanston, on issues of reimbursement, patient safety and medical liability. Shown, from left: Jeffery Murphy, Saint Francis Hospital CEO; Wolf Peddinghaus, MD, CMS District 1 president; Saroja Bharati, MD, CMS president-elect; Anne Kinnealey, MD, Saint Francis medical staff president; and Dr. Swaminathan.

- Presentation on “Adverse Childhood Experiences: Long Term Health Consequences and Their Impact on Medical Practice.”
- “Advocating for Policies to Reduce Binge Drinking: The AMA Experience in College Communities.”
Hundreds signed an open letter to America’s patients regarding the looming cuts in Medicare physician payments. Delegates generated a buzz on Capitol Hill by calling and e-mailing members of Congress through the AMA Grassroots Hot Line, urging immediate action to stop the 5 percent cut slated for Jan. 1, 2007. The AMA also delivered letters to House and Senate leaders, committee chairs and ranking minority members. Full-page ads showing the open letter bearing physicians’ signatures ran in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

Value-driven health care on front burner

THE OPENING SESSION OF THE AMA INTERIM meeting featured Michael O. Leavitt, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, who acknowledged the tension and anxiety associated with measuring the performance of physicians. Part of it is due to the fact quality measurement is still in its infancy, said Mr. Leavitt, and many physicians are understandably wary of bearing the costs of electronic health records systems that are expensive and not yet interoperable.

He described the accomplishments of the AMA-convened Physician Consortium on Performance Improvement as "heroic," and added that, "If the MDs don't develop quality measures, the MBAs will." In the future, he said, it is likely that "cost and quality are going to be part of the equation" when it comes to the way Medicare payments are structured. He acknowledged that so far, his agency's pilot programs on quality reporting have shown him that, "We are not very good at this."

Proving Genomics: A Workshop for Physicians

SPEAKING AT THE AMA MEETING, RICK J. Carlson, JD, of the University of Washington's Genetic Services Policy Project, predicted that within the next decade, patients likely will spend about \$100 to have their genetic information rendered on to a microchip to carry with them at all

times. However, he said, the widespread use of genomic information for therapeutic purposes likely will take several decades and be "messy and expensive." Some of the most promising applications for genomics lie in pharmacogenomics, or individualizing drug therapies based on genetic information, said David L. Veenstra, PharmD, PhD, who is studying the implications of genomics on clinical practice. Although the technology exists now to detect many genetic variants, the majority of variations have little or no influence on a person's health, Mr. Veenstra pointed out. Both panelists agreed that diagnostic capabilities in genomics will advance far more rapidly than personalized therapies based on genetics.

Source: American Medical Association

A resolution's journey: from county to national level

FOR CHICAGO MEDICAL SOCIETY DELEGATES and alternates in attendance at the AMA meeting, one highlight was passage of a resolution that originated at the CMS level:

Internet Child Pornography. The newly adopted AMA policy calls for greater awareness of the public health and safety concerns for children with unsupervised access to the Internet. The language calls for physicians to encourage parents and guardians to recognize the health benefits and dangers to young users of the Internet. Physicians are encouraged to participate in raising parental awareness about helpful strategies for reducing Internet use and limiting exposure to harmful content.

continued on p. 4

NEWS FOR CHICAGO PHYSICIANS

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AMA INTERIM MEETING...*(continued from page 2)*

Other headline-making resolutions included:

- **Emergency medicine:** Calls for the creation and funding of additional residency training positions in specialties that provide emergency and trauma care to increase the physician workforce; working to ensure payment to physicians from insurers for providing emergency care regardless of in-network or out-of-network patient status; securing bonus payments for physicians providing emergency services in physician shortage areas, and advocating for federal and state liability protection for emergency physicians; improving the efficiency of emergency care by identifying best practices for the staffing, delivery and financing of emergency services.
- **Obesity prevention:** Calls for the AMA to assume a leadership role in collaborating with other interested organizations to find ways to fund the study, prevention and treatment of obesity, as well as health and medical programs to serve vulnerable populations.
- **Mercury pollution:** Calls on the U.S. to take a leadership role at both the state and federal level to reduce national and global mercury emissions.

The new policy also recognizes that the trading of air pollutants is potentially harmful for vulnerable populations, and that the Clear Air Mercury Rule is inconsistent with the AMA's health protective approach to air pollution.

- **Hormone compounds:** Calls on the FDA to conduct surveys for purity and dosage accuracy; calls for mandatory reporting by drug manufacturers, including compounding pharmacies, of adverse events to create a registry of such events from bioidentical hormone usage. The policy also calls on the FDA to require standard patient information, such as warnings and precautions, in packaging of compounded bioidentical hormone products, and to prohibit the use of the term bioidentical unless the preparation has been approved by the FDA.

- **Smoke-free AMA meetings:** Calls for all AMA meetings and conferences to be held in communities and states that have enacted comprehensive legislation requiring smoke-free worksites and public places, including restaurants and bars. The AMA also called on other medical organizations to adopt similar policies.

Source: American Medical Association

AMA to patients: "share your voice"

THROUGH A NEW AMA AD CAMPAIGN, Americans are being encouraged to share their concerns about the health care system—with both their doctors and with the AMA. The "Voices" commercials, which appeared on network and cable TV this fall, show a large gathering of doctors and patients, each person speaking into a stethoscope. The image of doctors and patients joining forces is complemented by a ballad and lyrics.

DR. DONOGHUE'S LEGACY

Medical examiner retires after three decades



Donoghue

CMS PAST PRESIDENT EDMUND R. Donoghue, MD, recently announced his retirement from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office effective Dec. 31. A member of the CMS Third District, Dr. Donoghue has been chief medical examiner since 1993; he joined the office as deputy in 1977. Highlights of his career included identifying the 273 victims of the American Air-

lines Flight 191 that crashed outside O'Hare Airport in 1979; investigating the cyanide-laced Tylenol in 1982 and issuing a public warning; the Heat Wave of 1995 and investigation into more than 700 deaths. Dr. Donoghue was CMS president from 2001-2002 and has been a member of the Society since 1990. He will be moving to Savannah, Georgia, where he will be a coastal regional medical examiner with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and will share responsibility for 13 counties in southeastern Georgia.

THE FIXER

CMS Agency helps retiring doctor, new partner

RECENTLY A CLIENT OF THE CMS INSURANCE Agency approached staff for their help and expertise in resolving a problem. The physician wanted to retire soon and was in the process of adding a new partner to replace him in the practice. The new partner would take over after the doctors had worked together for approximately one month.

But the retiring physician was concerned that the group's insurance carrier wouldn't accept the new partner because he was currently practicing out of state. Before the new partner could resign from his current position and join the new practice, the Agency had to make

sure his medical liability insurance was in place.

The CMS Insurance Agency contacted the carrier's underwriting department, filled out all of the necessary paperwork and personally worked with the underwriter to make sure the practice and the physician met all the underwriting guidelines.

Through the diligence of Agency staff, the client was able to add the new partner effortlessly and retire as desired.

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CHICAGO DIABETES CHALLENGE

MBGH goal: improve health, lower costs

The Chicago-based Midwest Business Group on Health (MBGH) was founded in 1980 by a small group of large Midwest employers to help all types of purchasers—employers' and their employees—obtain more value from their health care benefit dollars. The MBGH also represents businesses in helping to improve the quality and safety of health care services and to find workable solutions to problems in the community.

MGBH IS IMPLEMENTING THE CHICAGO Diabetes Challenge, a collaborative involving physicians, employers, pharmacists and designated “diabetes education centers.” The joint effort is based on a successful program in Asheville, NC, in which the city waived co-pays for diabetic drugs and devices as long as diabetic employees agreed to meet with specially trained pharmacists once a month.

Pharmacists performed screenings, educated patients about the disease, and encouraged self-care and healthy behaviors. Physicians received summary reports and maintained overall responsibility

for the care of patients and changes in therapy. Program directors reported that the number of patients visiting their personal physicians had increased, and that the number of patients complying with physician treatment plans had improved. The Challenge is funded by Novo Nordisk and Novartis, in cooperation with the Illinois Pharmacists Association.

Another lesson learned from Asheville is how a community-based medication therapy management program for asthma helped the residents. As in the Asheville diabetic project, patients who received education and long-term medication therapy management services achieved and maintained significant improvements and had significantly decreased overall disease-related costs despite increased medication costs that resulted from increased use.

Today, MBGH is one of the nation's leading coalitions of private and public employers. MBGH's 80+ members employ over two million workers, spending greater than \$2.5 billion on health care benefits.

Congress averts 2007 Medicare physician payment cut

AFTER AN AGGRESSIVE AMA-LED CAMPAIGN, Congress voted to avert next year's five percent Medicare physician payment. Organized medicine sincerely appreciates the bipartisan efforts by House and Senate leaders, committee chairmen, ranking minority members and congressional staff to prevent the Medicare cut triggered by the flawed Medicare physician payment formula. This action stops next year's cut by maintaining the current 2006 payment rate, and also sets aside funds to avert cuts in 2008. In addition, this legislation stops additional Medicare cuts to rural physicians.

"This action provides an important but temporary reprieve for seniors and the physicians who care for them," said Cecil B. Wilson, MD, chairman of the AMA Board of Trustees. "The AMA renews its commitment to work with Congress, the Administration and senior groups on a more permanent solution to the flawed Medicare physician

payment formula. The time is long overdue to devise a sound financing system for the Medicare program so we can avoid this annual struggle to preserve seniors' access to care."

The legislation also initiates a physician quality reporting program, and the AMA will continue to work with the Administration and Congress on ways to improve health care quality. The AMA-convened Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement has already developed 151 quality measures, and will work to ensure that Consortium measures continue to form the foundation of a Medicare quality reporting program. The AMA will work closely with the incoming Congress to address concerns with the current reporting framework, Dr. Wilson said.

Source: American Medical Association

Trial lawyers serve up constitutional challenge

IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE Illinois trial lawyers challenged the state's new medical litigation reform legislation. And they struck on Nov. 20, filing a lawsuit in the Circuit Court of Cook County claiming that caps on awards for pain and suffering are unconstitutional. The case involves an infant born with severe disabilities following a "botched" delivery, according to the plaintiff's attorney.

Since the new law's enactment last year, physicians have understood that any reforms would have to withstand a high-profile constitutional challenge. And now, with this long anticipated fight at hand, many doctors are welcoming the opportunity for the Court to determine the constitutionality of caps. "We remain confident that caps on non-economic damage awards, as well as the array of accompanying reforms enacted as part of the package, will pass constitutional muster," said ISMS President Peter E. Eupierre, MD, in a written statement.

"Balance and fairness in our state's medical litigation system are integral to ensuring patient access to core medical care services through Illinois."

The reform law, which took effect Aug. 25, 2005, limits awards for pain, suffering and disability to \$500,000 per doctor and \$1 million per hospital.

There are no limits for medical expenses.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Chicago's Plastic surgeons honor commitment

IT WAS AN EVENING OF CAMARADERIE AND celebration for the physicians attending the Chicago Society of Plastic Surgery's Annual Dinner on Nov. 1. Held at the University Club of Chicago, the event commemorated a year's worth of accomplishments. Neil Fine, MD, was recognized for his contributions and leadership as president (2005-2006). Gary Burget, MD, was awarded the Distinguished Service Award for outstanding contributions to the education, practice and advancement of plastic surgery; he also presented "Advances in the Aesthetics of Nasal Reconstruction." Two retiring members, M.R. Jayasanker, MD, and Gabriel Mooney, MD, were awarded the Physicians Recognition Award for their lifelong commitment to the field.



Neil Fine, MD, left, presents the Distinguished Service Award to Gary Burget, MD.



Newly elected President Norman Weinzweig, MD, right, congratulates Dr. Fine on his term as president.



Physicians Recognition Award recipients M.R. Jayasanker, MD, left, and Gabriel Mooney, MD.

AT YOUR LEISURE

Something to wine about

Wayne Sitzerman



Chicago's award-winning sommelier and television host ("Check Please") Alpana Singh, recently signed copies of her new book, "Alpana Pours," at the Culinary Historians of Chicago. Clockwise, from bottom right are: Ms. Singh; her co-author, Robert Scarola; Avrom Simon, MD; Marilyn and James Tarrant, CMS executive director; and Don Newcomb, founder, ChicaGourmets, a sponsor of the event.

Jim Price, ChicaGourmets



Following her morning appearance at the Culinary Historians of Chicago, Alpana Singh greeted guests at the CMS-endorsed ChicaGourmets luncheon in her honor at Custom House Restaurant, 500 S. Dearborn St. Joining the celebrity sommelier are, from left: John Payton, MD; Mary Doi, MD; (Ms. Singh); and Allen Charles, MD.

As a benefit of membership, all CMS members are considered members of ChicaGourmets, a premiere culinary organization with more than 50 fine-dining events a year.

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