

AAFP Among Organizations Protesting Proposed Tax Law Change

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), American Medical Association (AMA), and 90 other organizations recently sent a letter to U.S. Department of the Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner regarding the potential reversal of the Department's tax policy that maintains trial attorneys cannot deduct court and other litigation expenses as business expenses. Tax deductions for trial attorneys who enter into gross contingency fee contracts with their clients could entice some of these attorneys to file spurious lawsuits against physicians, further raising the cost of health care, the letter said. The letter also pointed out that President Obama and Congress members from both parties have acknowledged that the medical liability system is in need of reform to reduce meritless lawsuits. Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that effective medical liability reforms would decrease costs associated with physicians practicing so-called defensive medicine and save the government \$54 billion in a 10-year period. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/government-medicine/20100908taxlawletter.html>.

HHS Expands Medicare's Coverage of Counseling for Tobacco Cessation

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently announced that certain preventive care services, such as tobacco cessation counseling, will be covered by Medicare at no cost to beneficiaries. The new benefits, which also include annual physical examinations and certain screenings, take effect January 1, 2011. Medicare previously limited coverage of tobacco counseling to patients with a tobacco-related disease or symptoms of such a disease. HHS said the new benefit will cover two individual tobacco cessation counseling attempts per year, and each attempt may include as many as four counseling sessions. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/health-of-the-public/20100901medicaretobaccouse.html>.

Vaccination Rates Continue to Increase for U.S. Teens, According to CDC Survey

The results of a recently released survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show double-digit increases in 2009 for the percentage of U.S. teenagers who received at least one dose of two of the three vaccines routinely recommended for their age

group. Compared with 2008 figures, meningococcal conjugate vaccine coverage increased nearly 12 percent to 53.6 percent, and coverage for tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine increased nearly 15 percent to 55.6 percent. Human papillomavirus vaccine uptake among teenage women also increased compared with 2008 figures, although coverage with at least one vaccine dose remained less than 50 percent. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/clinical-care-research/20100901teenvaccrates.html> and <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5932a3.htm>.

Medical Journal Editors Update Author Disclosure, Conflict of Interest Form

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors updated its uniform disclosure form, which journal article authors fill out to report potential conflicts of interest. The form asks authors for information that includes an accounting of direct or indirect resources received to complete the work referenced in their manuscripts; a description of financial relationships with biomedical entities that could influence the manuscript's content; and information about other relationships or activities that readers could perceive as having influenced an author's work. There are 14 journals on the committee, including the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. *American Family Physician* has its own conflict of interest form. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/professional-issues/20100901icjmeform.html>.

FDA Requires Label Changes Regarding Latex in Syringe Caps of Influenza Vaccines

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently began requiring manufacturers to update influenza vaccine labels to highlight concerns that the tip caps of these products shipped in prefilled syringes may contain natural rubber latex, which can cause allergic reactions in latex-sensitive persons. Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics informed physicians that the tip caps of its influenza vaccines (Fluvirin, Agriflu) shipped in prefilled syringes may contain natural rubber latex. GlaxoSmithKline said the labeling changes to its influenza vaccine, Fluarix, will cause fewer doses to be delivered to the U.S. market, whereas Sanofi Pasteur said the changes will cause a two- to three-week delay in Fluzone shipments. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/clinical-care-research/20100825fluvaccinelatex.html>.

FDA, CDC Warn of Infection Transmission from Misuse of Fingertick, Similar Devices

The FDA has issued a safety alert about the potential for bloodborne infection transmission associated with misuse of fingertick devices and point-of-care blood testing devices, including blood glucose meters and cholesterol testing devices, and the CDC has updated its safety information related to this topic. The FDA and the CDC have noted a steady increase in reports of bloodborne infection transmission during the past 10 to 15 years resulting from the shared use of such devices, with a significant increase in hepatitis B virus infection outbreaks linked to misuse of the devices in long-term care and assisted living settings. Recommendations include using a device in only one patient; using single-use, self-disabling fingertick devices for assisted monitoring of blood glucose; and having health care personnel change gloves between patients, regardless of device used. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/health-of-the-public/20100907fingertickalert.html>.

More Than 500 Million Eggs Recalled for Contamination in Illness Outbreak

About 550 million chicken eggs have been recalled because of potential contamination with *Salmonella enteritidis*, and reports of associated illness have spiked in recent months, according to the CDC. Public health officials have traced the illnesses back to eggs produced by two Iowa farming operations, but the two companies have shipped eggs to wholesalers, distribution centers, and food service companies in more than 20 states since May 2010. Wright County Egg in Galt, Iowa, and Hillandale Farms of Iowa in New Hampton both have recalled millions of eggs, and several of the companies' customers also have issued recalls. A complete list of recalled egg brands and other identifying information is available on the FDA Web site at <http://www.fda.gov/Food/NewsEvents/WhatsNewinFood/ucm223536.htm>. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/health-of-the-public/20100825eggrecall.html>.

Organizations Challenge "Red Flags Rule" Applicability to Physicians

The Council of Medical Specialty Societies (CMSS) recently filed a motion to intervene on behalf of all physicians in an existing case filed by the AMA, the American Osteopathic Association, and the Medical Society of the District of Columbia. The case involves whether an antifraud identity theft federal regulation known as the "Red Flags Rule" should be applicable to physicians. The rule, which was originally drafted in 2008 in connection with the implementation of the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003, requires financial institutions

and creditors, including physician practices, to address identity theft risk by implementing prevention programs. The AAFP is one of 26 medical organizations seeking to be added as plaintiffs pursuant to the CMSS motion, which seeks to prevent the Federal Trade Commission from applying the rule to physicians. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/practice-management/20100826redflagslawsuit.html>.

Federal Agency Names Initial Two EHR Testing, Certification Companies

The Office of the National Coordinator for Information Technology announced that two companies, the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology and the Drummond Group Inc., have been authorized to perform the initial testing and certification of electronic health record (EHR) systems for compliance with the standards and certification criteria that were issued by HHS earlier this year. An HHS news release said the announcement is a key step in the federal government's push to get America's physicians on board with integrating needed technology into their practices and meeting the required "meaningful use" objectives for EHRs. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/practice-management/20100901onccertification.html>.

AAFP Named as Subcontractor on Westat Contract Related to PCMHs

The AAFP's expertise in the areas of the patient-centered medical home (PCMH) and EHRs has led to a partnership with a nationally known, for-profit research firm to develop a PCMH information model and perform other related responsibilities. Maryland-based Westat was selected by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality as the prime contractor on one of the agency's health information technology (IT) technical assistance projects. Westat, in turn, designated the AAFP as its subcontractor to complete three specific tasks: create a PCMH information model; write technical specifications for EHRs and personal health records; and disseminate that information for use by a wider audience. Steven Waldren, MD, director of the AAFP's Center for Health IT, is the principle investigator on the project. He said a thorough literature review would precede development of the information model, which will map out the various interactions a patient has within the PCMH and be tested in geographically diverse patient focus groups. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/inside-aafp/20100908ahrqcontract.html>.

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