

Physician Use of EHR Systems Examined

A new study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* indicates that physicians are implementing electronic health record (EHR) technology in increasing numbers, but that much work remains. Investigators found that 43.5% of the office-based physicians surveyed had at least a basic EHR system, but only 9.8% achieved meaningful use as defined by the federal government's EHR meaningful use program. The physicians most commonly used EHRs to view laboratory test results, order prescriptions electronically, view radiology and imaging results, and record clinical notes. However, the study's authors noted that issues with EHR usability made it difficult for physicians to perform certain functions, including generating reports on quality of care and sending patient reminders for preventive or follow-up care. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/practice-professional-issues/20130607ehrimplementstudy.html>.

CMS Provides Billing Protocol to Avoid Payment Delays on Transitional Care

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recently acknowledged an error in its claims processing system that effectively prevented rural health centers and federally qualified health centers from receiving payment on claims filed when physicians applied two new CPT codes (99495 and 99496) regarding transitional care services. Until a solution is implemented, CMS recommends that these facilities bill for services using the line item date-of-service that reflects the date of the required face-to-face component for transitional care management. CMS also states that claims for transitional care services initiated by a physician working in one of these facilities should not be delayed, provided the physician follows a specific billing protocol and uses a specific revenue code. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/practice-professional-issues/20130603rhcs-fqhcs-tcm.html>.

AHRQ Addresses Health Care Quality and Access

Two reports released by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) showed mixed results with regard to health care quality and access in the United States. Researchers analyzed information from more than three dozen databases and reviewed health care trends in 2009 and 2010, including measures on health care quality, disparities, and access. The report on quality found that although the quality of care appears to be

improving slowly for Americans in all racial, ethnic, and income groups, the ability of Americans to access health care services worsened slightly. The report on disparities found significant disparities in quality of care and access to care based on individual income levels. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/practice-professional-issues/20130529ahrqreports.html>.

AAFP, Other Health Care Groups Support Proposed Rule on Background Checks

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) is joining with other health care organizations in asking the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to modify the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. In a June 6 letter to HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the organizations supported the creation of an "express permission" provision that would allow states to report the identities of individuals who are barred from buying or owning firearms because of a mental illness to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. They believe the provision would serve as a step toward reducing gun violence and would improve the background check system for the sale or transfer of firearms by licensed dealers. For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/government-medicine/20130607nicsproposedrule.html>.

Medical School Enrollment Increases; What About Residency Slots?

Results of the latest medical school enrollment survey conducted by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) indicate that although enrollment at U.S. medical schools and schools of osteopathic medicine continues to increase, the number of federally funded residency training positions available may soon be insufficient to meet the needs of enrolled students. AAMC President and Chief Executive Officer Darrell Kirch, MD, said that the increased enrollment will help avert a shortage of primary care physicians, but he cautioned that the increase "will not result in a single new practicing physician unless Congress acts now to lift the cap on residency training positions." For more information, visit <http://www.aafp.org/news-now/education-professional-development/20130520enrollment.html>.

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