



# AAFP News: *AFP* Edition

*Policy and Health Issues in the News*

## **VA Launches Campaign to Recruit Physicians**

Acknowledging that a shortage of physicians is one reason why the nation's veterans encounter long delays in receiving treatment, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a campaign to recruit more physicians and other clinicians to work in its facilities. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald plans to visit medical schools nationwide in an effort to draw more physicians to work at VA hospitals with a shortage of primary care physicians. Officials are also considering pay increases for physicians who work at the VA to bring their compensation to a level commensurate with that of physicians employed at academic medical centers or in private practice. The agency will expand the existing loan repayment program for medical students as an additional incentive. Other proposals under consideration include expanding a pilot project to bring combat medics and corpsmen into VA facilities as clinicians; developing a partnership with academic nursing centers to provide mental health care for veterans; collaborating with the Department of Defense to improve recruitment of recently or soon-to-be discharged health care professionals; and streamlining the credentialing process for health care professionals. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20140909varecruits.html>.

## **CMS Sets Dates for ICD-10 Testing**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will offer three separate weeks of acknowledgment testing in preparation for the nation's implementation of the International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision (ICD-10) code set for outpatient diagnostic coding. Testing will be performed November 17 through 21, 2014; March 2 through 6, 2015; and June 1 through 5, 2015. CMS recently finalized the October 1, 2015, compliance date for implementation of the new coding system, an overhaul that stands to increase the number of diagnostic codes available to physicians from about 13,000 to more than 68,000. According to information provided by the agency, the testing weeks were created to generate awareness and instill confidence that CMS and Medicare administrative contractors are prepared for the ICD-10 implementation. About 2,500 volunteers will submit test claims using ICD-10 codes over the course of the three testing weeks. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20140909icd-10test.html>.

## **Study: One in 15 Family Physicians Devotes Majority of Time to Emergency Care**

Family physicians are expected to provide comprehensive care while also accommodating the diverse care needs of their particular patient populations. In the nation's rural areas, that can mean spending more time in emergency care settings, according to a recent data analysis. About one out of every 15 family physicians devotes at least 80% of his or her time to emergency or urgent care, according to researchers at the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care, with those in remote areas taking on a higher percentage of these patients compared with their urban peers. The findings were published in the July/August 2014 issue of the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*. Using data routinely collected from Maintenance of Certification for Family Physicians examination applications completed between 2008 and 2012, researchers categorized physicians according to the geographic setting in which they worked, ranging from urban to small rural to frontier. In frontier areas, more than 8% of family physicians reported devoting 80% or more of their time to emergency or urgent care. In urban areas, the figure dropped to slightly more than 3%. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/practice-professional-issues/20140910rgc-eranalysis.html>.

## **Rule Seeks to Simplify EHR Certification**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology has finalized a rule that gives physicians and other health care professionals more flexibility in terms of certification of electronic health records (EHRs). Rather than adopt the "voluntary edition" criteria that were initially proposed, the agency instead adopted a small subset of the original proposals and recast them as optional 2014 edition EHR certification criteria with a new name: 2014 Edition Release 2. Among provisions in the final rule are 10 optional and two revised certification criteria for inclusion in the 2014 edition. The agency also discontinued its Complete EHR certification concept. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20140915finalehrcenterule.html>.

— AFP AND AAFP NEWS STAFF

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