

# AAFP News: *AFP* Edition

## *Policy and Health Issues in the News*

### **AAFP Releases Policies on Medical Marijuana, OTC Contraceptives, Firearms**

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) has updated its policies on medical marijuana, over-the-counter (OTC) contraceptives, and firearms. Regarding medical marijuana use, the policy reads: "The AAFP recognizes that there is support for the medical use of marijuana but advocates that usage be based on high-quality, patient-centered, evidence-based research and advocates for further studies into the use of medical marijuana and related compounds." It also calls on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to change marijuana's classification for the purpose of facilitating clinical research, and to ensure that funding is available for such research. Secondly, the AAFP supports OTC access to oral contraceptives. According to Jennifer Frost, MD, medical director for the AAFP Health of the Public and Science Division, many physicians are not aware of the available evidence on OTC contraceptives and, therefore, have concerns about safety and continuity of care. However, evidence shows that women can self-screen for contraindications to oral contraceptives, and that it does not prevent them from seeking primary care, she said. Finally, the AAFP supports increased research into how gun violence affects public health, including research into the epidemiology, prevention, safety, and risks related to gun violence. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/health-of-the-public/20141001policyrndup.html>.

### **Survey: Physicians' Morale Up Despite Heavy Workload, Health Policy Changes**

Although many physicians report that they are overextended or working at capacity, an increasing number say that given the choice, they would go into medicine again. The 2014 Survey of America's Physicians revealed that physicians find the profession rewarding but are concerned about how the business side of health care and new health care policy will affect their practices. Compared with 2012 survey results, physicians were more likely this year to describe their morale and their feelings about the current state of the profession as very positive or somewhat positive. In general, physicians who were younger, female, or employed—as well as those practicing primary care—were more positive about the current practice environment. Although physicians who responded to the 2014 survey reported being busier than before, with slightly more than 81% saying they were overextended or working at capacity compared with

about 76% in 2012, they actually worked slightly fewer hours per week than in years past. According to the 2014 survey, the average was less than 53 hours, virtually identical to what physicians reported working in 2012, but down from nearly 57 hours in 2008. Of that total, respondents reported they spent between 10 and 11 hours on nonclinical tasks such as paperwork. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/practice-professional-issues/20141009practicesurvey.html>.

### **Fewer Family Physicians Caring for Children**

Although discussions about the growing shortage of primary care physicians have focused on care for adults, many children also face difficulties in accessing primary health care services. New research suggests the latter problem could be exacerbated in the coming years. According to a study from the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care, the number of family physicians who provide care for children in their practices has declined in the past decade, from 78% in 2000 to 68% in 2009. The 10-point drop can be attributed to a range of factors, including physician age and the availability of pediatricians in the area. Overall, family physicians spend about 10% of their time on care for children and are considered the usual source of care for one-third of this population. In all, family physicians account for 16% to 21% of child care visits. For more information, go to <http://www.aafp.org/news/practice-professional-issues/20140924annfammed-childcare.html>.

### **AAFP Website Offers Resources on Ebola**

As fears about Ebola increase in the United States, physicians must be prepared to respond, whether to answer patients' questions or to detect an infected patient. The AAFP has compiled an online list of resources to help physicians determine which patients may be infected, protect themselves and others from exposure, and respond with appropriate patient care. The website (<http://www.aafp.org/patient-care/inform/ebola.html>) also includes a list of frequently asked questions about Ebola, and a link to an algorithm from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on evaluating persons who have recently returned from traveling.

— *AFP and AAFP NEWS STAFF*

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