

AAFP News: *AFP* Edition

Policy and Health Issues in the News

AMA Task Force Reports Progress on Reversing Opioid Epidemic

The American Medical Association (AMA) Opioid Task Force, which was launched in 2014 to identify best practices for combatting opioid abuse, issued a 2018 progress report outlining opioid trends. The task force found that opioid prescriptions decreased by more than 55 million (22%) between 2013 and 2017; that access to state prescription drug monitoring programs increased 121% from 2016; and that naloxone prescriptions more than doubled in 2017. In addition, nearly 550,000 health care professionals completed continuing medical education or similar training in pain management, substance use disorders, and related areas. Various opioid resources can be accessed from the American Academy of Family Physicians' online information hub on pain management and opioid abuse at <https://www.aafp.org/patient-care/public-health/pain-opioids.html>, as well as from the AMA's opioid microsite at <http://www.end-opioid-epidemic.org>. For more information, go to <https://www.aafp.org/news/health-of-the-public/20180606amaopioidtaskforce.html>.

The Role of Patient Portals and Social Media in Health Care Communication

Results from two recent surveys reaffirm long-standing trends in the ways patients use social media and the Internet to access health information and communicate with physicians, as well as underscore the communication challenges family physicians face in meeting the needs of a diverse patient base. The first survey found that 54% of millennials and 42% of all adults report that they are or would like to be "friends" with their health care professional on social media; 65% of millennials and 43% of all adults think it is appropriate to use social media to contact their physician about a health issue; and 32% of those surveyed have taken a health-related action (e.g., modifying their diet, taking a dietary supplement) based on information they read on social media. The second survey found that 51% of adults 50 to 80 years of age have set up an account on a patient portal, and 84% of these patients used their account to view test results, 43% to refill a prescription, 37% to schedule an appointment, and 26% to get advice about a health problem. As increasing numbers of patients communicate via e-mail, social media, or a web portal, family physicians have adjusted their own communication methods to best address the needs of their patients. For more information, go to <https://www.aafp.org/news/practice-professional-issues/20180608commsurveys.html>.

CDC Reports a Spike in U.S. Suicide Rates

Nearly 45,000 Americans 10 years or older took their own lives in 2016, which according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a rate increase of nearly 30% since 1999. Although suicide rates increased among persons in all age groups younger than 75 years, adults 45 to 64 years of age had the largest absolute rate increase (from 13.2 to 19.2 per 100,000 persons) and the greatest number of suicides (232,108). Family physicians have a role in preventing suicide by screening all adults for depression, providing further evaluation for those who screen positive, and facilitating appropriate treatment. The CDC offers tips to help prevent suicide that family physicians can pass along to patients, such as learning about the warning signs of suicide to identify and appropriately respond to persons at risk, reducing access to lethal means (e.g., medications, firearms), and contacting the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK) for help. For more information, go to <https://www.aafp.org/news/health-of-the-public/20180612cdcsuicide.html>.

High-Deductible Health Plans May Impede Preventive Care

Americans with high-deductible health insurance plans but no health savings accounts (HSAs) are less likely to see family physicians, receive preventive care, or seek subspecialty services, according to researchers at the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care. In a first-of-its-kind national study published in the May 23 issue of *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, researchers pooled data from the 2011 to 2014 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey for 25,965 privately insured adults 18 to 64 years of age were examined and divided into four insurance types: (1) no deductible; (2) low deductible; (3) high deductible with an HSA; and (4) high deductible without an HSA. Compared with persons who had no deductibles, those enrolled in high-deductible plans without an HSA were 7% less likely to be screened for breast cancer and 4% less likely to be screened for hypertension, and their rate of influenza vaccination was 8% lower. The study establishes that high-deductible plan enrollees without HSAs see family physicians less often and lose opportunities for preventive care. For more information, go to <https://www.aafp.org/news/practice-professional-issues/20180612hdhpstudy.html>.

—AFP and AAFP NEWS STAFF

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