

March 8, 2013

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NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON...

- * The House Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee plans a hearing “Obamacare’s Impact on Jobs” on March 13.
- * The House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing on annual report of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) updating Medicare payment policy.

1. PHYSICIAN OFFICES HELP EMPLOYMENT PICTURE

The U.S Department of Labor released the unemployment numbers for February this morning. Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 236,000 in February. Of interest, the report included the following:

The health care industry continued to add jobs in February (+32,000). Within health care, there was a job gain of 14,000 in ambulatory health care services, which includes doctors' offices and outpatient care centers. [Emphasis added.] Employment also increased over the month in nursing and residential care facilities (+9,000) and hospitals (+9,000).

2. APPROPRIATORS SIGNAL CUTS IN DUPLICATIVE PROGRAMS

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held its first hearing of the new Congress on Tuesday, March 5 with a panel of witnesses from five HHS agencies: Patrick Conway, director of the Center for Clinical Standards and Quality and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) chief medical; Francis Collins, director of National Institutes of Health; Tom Frieden, director of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Carolyn Clancy, director of Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; and Mary Wakefield, administrator of the Health Resources and Service Administration.

Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA), who chairs the subcommittee, asked the witnesses to explain how much of their federally funded health services research duplicates other federal programs or projects. Rep. Kingston and others on the subcommittee made it clear that they are looking for duplicative programs to cut in their funding proposals.

Dr. Collins pointed out that the NIH funds large, randomized clinical trials with patients free of other disease complications while AHRQ studies patients in the real world. Dr. Clancy noted their progress in avoiding healthcare-associated infections and insisted that the agencies work collaboratively so that their spending is not redundant.

3. HOUSE PASSES A MEASURE TO AVERT GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

The House, on Wednesday, March 6, approved the *Department of Defense, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act* (HR 933) to extend the federal agencies' stopgap funding authority through the end of fiscal year 2013 on a 267-151 vote. The House spending bill also extends the FY 2012 funding for the remainder of the year, minus an across-the-board cut of 0.098 percent. As a result, every appropriated program will first be reduced by the 0.098 percent cut and then reduced by the sequester cut of 5.0 percent.

The Senate is expected to debate a final FY 2013 spending bill preventing a government shutdown starting next week. However, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) has threatened to offer an amendment to the continuing resolution to delay funding for the health reform law and will not support any funding bill that provides federal funds to implement the law.

4. AAFP MEETS WITH JOINING FORCES OFFICIALS AT WHITE HOUSE

On March 5, President-Elect Dr. Reid Blackwelder represented the AAFP at a Joining Forces meeting held in the East Wing of the White House. Last year, the AAFP united with First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of the Vice President, in a campaign called Joining Forces, which aims to support veterans and their families.

In addition to other national medical organizations representing primary care physicians, also attending the recent meeting were staff from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and several Veteran Service Organizations (VSO). During the meeting, Administration officials and meeting attendees discussed ways to improve:

- access to care for women who are veterans;
- access to mental health services for all veterans; and
- the process for completing the Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) by modernizing and integrating these forms into a practice's EHR system

The AAFP took this opportunity to reinforce that family physicians are ideally positioned to assist veterans with each of these efforts and pledged continued support to increase member awareness of veterans' issues. Visit the AAFP's dedicated Joining Forces [website](#) for further information on this important campaign.

5. FamMedPAC MAINTAINS HIGH PROFILE FOR FAMILY MEDICINE

FamMedPAC participated in and hosted several meetings with legislators this week, including a meet and greet for a new Congressional Representative held in the new Government Relations offices in Washington. FamMedPAC participated in events for the following:

- **Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY)**, a newly elected Representative, who conferred with representatives of several physician specialty societies at a small reception.
- **Rep. Tom Price (R-GA)**, a physician who serves on the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Congressional Doctors' Caucus.
- Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which held a physician's reception for newly elected House Democrats. **Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA)** served as host for the reception for more than a dozen Democratic legislators. **Rep. Dan Maffei (D-NY)** announced at the reception that he co-sponsoring the SGR fix legislation authored by Rep. Schwartz. The bill is supported by AAFP.

- **Sen. Mark Udall (D-CO)**, who represents the home state of AAFP President Dr. Jeff Cain, is completing his first term in the Senate and is running for reelection.
- **Rep. John Fleming (R-LA)**, a family physician in his third term, was honored at this luncheon, which FamMedPAC sponsored.
- **Rep. Allen Lowenthal (D-CA)**, who is a psychologist and newly elected, and who is married to a family physician who is a member of the AAFP, participated in this reception with the other medical specialty societies at the new offices in Washington.

6. REGULATORY BRIEFS

- On March 5, HHS published a [notice](#) of interest rate on overdue debts. In it, the current rate of 10.625 percent is certified and is effective until the Secretary of the Treasury notifies HHS of any changes.
- On March 6, the CMS and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology jointly issued a [request](#) for public input on “potential policy and programmatic changes to accelerate electronic health information exchange across providers, as well as new ideas that would be both effective and feasible to implement.”
- On March 7, CMS announced the fifth round of Community Based Care Transitions Program (CCTP) participants. In this round, 20 additional participants will join the 82 existing CCTP organizations. These participants work with local hospitals and other health care and social service providers to support Medicare patients who are at increased risk of being readmitted to the hospital while transitioning from hospital stays to their homes, a nursing home, or other care settings. Future opportunities to apply are on the [CCTP website](#).