

November 21, 2014

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NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON...

* In observance of Thanksgiving, Congress is in recess until Monday, December 1.

1. THE AAFP PRESSES CONGRESS, HRSA ON TEACHING HEALTH CENTERS

On November 14, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) announced that the Teaching Health Centers' Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) program will reduce the per-resident FTE payment from \$150,000 to \$70,000. This reduction applies to the 2015-2016 academic year. The AAFP sent a [letter](#) to HRSA expressing serious concerns about the impact of the cut on the THCGME program.

The THCGME program, authorized by the *Affordable Care Act*, received \$230 million fiscal years 2011 through 2015. The THCGME program of community-based primary care residency training capacity currently supports 60 residency programs in 24 states. HRSA has projected that there will be approximately \$50 million remaining to support approximately 700 resident FTEs in the 2015-2016 academic year. If the total number of residents supported by the program is less than the 700 estimated, the amount per resident available could increase.

2. HPNEC URGES CONGRESS TO FUND HEALTH PROFESSIONS TRAINING

As the Congress is working to finalize a spending package for the current fiscal year, the AAFP continues to advocate for a robust investment in primary care medicine training grants. As part of that effort, the AAFP was one of the 62 organizations which signed the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (HPNEC) [letter](#) to House and Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee leadership urging full funding for Title VII in FY 2015.

3. HOUSE SUES ADMINISTRATION OVER HEALTH CARE IMPLEMENTATION

The House of Representatives filed suit against the Obama Administration for unconstitutional and unlawful actions taken with respect of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA). It was filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on Friday, November 21.

The lawsuit is based on how HHS implemented two aspects of the ACA. The first is its delay of the employer mandate, which was supposed to be in effect this year but now does not take effect until at least 2015. The second issue is the cost-sharing subsidies that the law allows for people with incomes up to 250 percent of the federal poverty line. The suit says the Obama administration needs — and never got — an appropriation from Congress for those subsidies.

4. CONGRESS EXAMINES EBOLA ISSUES

On November 19, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee approved a bipartisan bill titled, the *Adding Ebola to the FDA Priority Review Voucher Program Act* (S. 2917) that would add Ebola hemorrhagic fever to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) priority review voucher incentive program for neglected and tropical diseases that disproportionately affect poor and marginalized populations. The program targets 16 diseases including leprosy, dengue, tuberculosis and malaria. When the program was authorized in 2007, there was no Ebola epidemic underway and drug developers did not qualify for FDA priority review vouchers for Ebola drugs and vaccines. According to the World Health Organization, the 2014 Ebola epidemic is the largest of the virus in history. The bill was sponsored by Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), chair of the Senate HELP Committee, and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), senior Republican member of the Senate HELP Committee. It may come up for a vote within the full Senate during the lame duck Congressional session.

On November 19, the House Energy & Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Health held a [hearing](#) on the development of Ebola treatments, vaccines and diagnostics. Its Oversight Subcommittee also held a hearing regarding the [public health](#) response to Ebola.

5. HOUSE APPROVES THE LOW DOSE RADIATION RESEARCH ACT

On November 17, the House of Representatives approved the [Low-Dose Radiation Research Act](#) (H.R. 5544), a bill that requires the Department of Energy to carry out a research program on low-dose radiation. Rep. Paul Broun, MD (R-GA), who chairs the House Oversight Subcommittee on Science, Space and Technology, sponsored H.R. 5544.

In introducing the measure, Rep. Broun stated that H.R. 5544 will help improve awareness in the field of low-dose radiation for the betterment of medicine, for emergency response planning, and for industrial safety. The bill defines low-dose radiation as less than 100 millisieverts. Under the legislation, the National Academies of Science will conduct a study assessing the current status and development of a long-term strategy for low-dose radiation research. The impetus behind the introduction of the Low-Dose Radiation Research Act is consistent with the [Choosing Wisely](#) campaign that calls on clinicians to avoid unnecessary testing and treatments that may be ineffective and cause harm. The campaign also includes clinical guidelines, including recommendations regarding the appropriate and safe use of [diagnostic imaging](#).

6. OPEN ENROLLMENT REACHES ITS SECOND YEAR

On Saturday, November 15, the second open enrollment period began without any major problems. According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), over the weekend, more than a million people visited HealthCare.gov and over 200,000 people contacted the call center to learn about their options and get enrolled. And on the first day of open enrollment, more than 100,000 people had submitted an application. If current insureds take no action this fall, their coverage will automatically be renewed. Open enrollment continues from November 15, 2014 to February 15, 2015. Consumers must select a plan by December 15, 2014, to have coverage beginning January 1, 2015.

7. 2014 STATE LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE WRAP-UP

On November 14-15, over 100 representatives from 33 states attended the AAFP State Legislative Conference in New Orleans. Chapter presidents and leadership, chapter executives and staff, as well as AAFP leadership and staff attended. The meeting featured speakers and panels on Retail Clinics, Prescription Drug Abuse, State Chapter Advocacy Days, the Health Is Primary campaign, the Federal Trade Commission, Elections, Graduate Medical Education, Direct Primary Care, and other matters affecting AAFP members at the state level. The conference received an overwhelmingly positive review from attendees. To see the presentations and materials from the conference, visit the [2014 State Legislative Conference Dropbox](#).

8. REGULATORY BRIEFS

- On November 12, CMS [awarded](#) \$3.9 million to improve access to quality health care services for American Indian and Alaska Native Children.
- On November 14, CMS [released](#) data on 2015 Health Insurance Marketplaces. Open enrollment in the Marketplace began November 15 and runs through February 15, 2015.
- On November 19, CMS [announced](#) the creation of the Office of Enterprise Data and Analytics which will be led by Niall Brennan, the agency's first Chief Data Officer. It is tasked with overseeing improvements in data collection and dissemination.
- On November 19, HHS [announced](#) the appointment of Melissa Stafford Jones as the Region IX Regional Director which serves Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada and the U.S. Pacific territories.
- CMS will host the following free educational call, [registration](#) is required:
 - Changes to the 2015 Physician Quality Reporting Programs on Tuesday, December 2, 1:30pm ET;
 - National Partnership to Improve Dementia Care in Nursing Homes on Tuesday, December 9, 1:30pm ET;
 - Certifying Patients for the Medicare Home Health Benefit on Tuesday, December 16, 1:30pm ET.