POLICY & PRACTICE

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Diabetes Care Barriers Explored

Lack of time with patients, inadequate reimbursement, and lack of patient adherence are the three main barriers to diabetes care, according to a white paper released by the Diabetes Working Group. To overcome the barriers, issues including payment reform, physician and health care provider supply, and changes in care management – such as incorporating health IT tools and increasing use of shared decision-making – must be addressed. "With the increasing cost and occurrence of diabetes and its complications, treatment is more important than ever, and successful treatment of people suffering from diabetes requires active participation from the patient and the health care delivery team to achieve desired outcomes," the group wrote in its report.

Medicare Covers Thyroid Gene Test

Afirma Gene Expression Classifier, a genomic test for use in thyroid nodule diagnosis, is now covered by Medicare. The test, developed by Veracyte Inc., helps resolve inconclusive results on thyroid nodule fine needle aspiration samples with a high degree of accuracy, according to a company statement. Two independent, multicenter, prospective clinical trials have shown the gene expression test's role in reclassifying patients. In addition, "a more consistent and transparent approach to reimbursement will help to further drive innovation in the rapidly growing molecular diagnostics field," Dr. Elaine Jeter, medical director of Palmetto GBA, a national contractor administering Medicare benefits, said in a statement.

Grant to Foster Diabetes Research

There is much emphasis on prevention and treatment of diabetes, but there are still unanswered questions about its causes. The Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, a medical university, has received a 1.6 million–Euro grant to study the fundamental causes of diabetes. "Diabetes is a global problem, and this means that it is vital that we understand the causes of the disease, in order to be able to offer more effective treatment," Robert af Jochnick, one of the founders of the Jochnick Foundation, which provided the grant, said in a statement. With the grant, researchers plan to use microscope technology to observe "in detail and for long periods, how various signals control the release of insulin in living animals," according to a statement from the institute. The research will also enable scientists to identify new targets for more effective and specific diabetes drugs.

Gardasil, Autoimmunity Not Linked

The human papillomavirus vaccine Gardasil does not trigger autoimmune conditions such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, or multiple sclerosis in young women, according to a study from Kaiser Permanente. The study, reported in the Journal of Internal Medicine, looked at electronic health records of 189,629 females aged 9-26 years who were followed for 6 months after receiving each of three Gardasil doses. Researchers did not find increases in 16 autoimmune conditions among the vaccinated population when compared with a matched group of unvaccinated girls and women. The study was funded by Merck, which manufactures Gardasil.

School Lunch Standards Unveiled

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has unveiled new school lunch standards that should lead to more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains on children's lunch trays. The standards call for schools to serve only low-fat or fat-free milk; limit calories in age-appropriate portion sizes; and attempt to decrease sodium, trans fats, and saturated fats in cafeteria foods. The new rules will encourage schools to replace items such as hot dogs on white buns with selections such as low-fat turkey breast on a whole wheat submarine roll, according to the USDA. However, tomato paste and starchy vegetables including white potatoes still count as vegetables under the new standards. Last year's USDA appropriations bill included language to that effect, thereby protecting pizza and french fries in the school lunch program. The new rules will be phased in beginning in the next school year.

–Naseem S. Miller