Policy & Practice

TBI Bill Passes Senate

The reauthorization of the Traumatic Brain Injury Act moved one step closer to becoming law last month when the Senate approved the legislation. The bill now awaits action in the House. The legislation (S. 793) would authorize continued funding for a number of federal traumatic brain injury programs and would provide grants to states for community-based services. The legislation also mandates several new studies to determine the incidence and prevalence of traumatic brain injury, identify therapeutic interventions, and develop guidelines for rehabilitation. In addition, the Senate bill calls on the Government Accountability Office to determine what challenges soldiers who have sustained a traumatic brain injury face when returning to their communities. As of December 2007, more than 30,000 soldiers have been wounded in Iraq, and brain injuries account for approximately two-thirds of those injuries, according to Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), who sponsored the bill.

Migraine Research Funding

Migraine research got an infusion of funding recently when the Migraine Research Foundation announced plans to spend at least $500,000 this year to fund grants to investigate the causes of and cures for migraines. And the organization committed to awarding more money each year for migraine research. "Migraine is underresearched by the scientific community, undertreated by physicians, and underappreciated by society," Dr. Joel Saper of Michigan State University, chair of the foundation's medical advisory board, said in a statement. "The Migraine Research Foundation is about more than just the research that it will fund directly—it is about stimulating others to join us in addressing a critical gap in medical research." The Migraine Research Foundation is a nonprofit group founded by Stephen Semlitz and Cathy Glaser, whose family has struggled with migraines. The organization's funding comes from private donors, including individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Autism Network Triples in Size

Autism Speaks, an autism advocacy organization, is planning to significantly expand its Autism Treatment Network from 5 to 15 sites at hospitals and medical centers across the United States and Canada. The idea behind the network is to encourage collaboration among different medical specialists and ultimately to develop common clinical standards for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder. The Autism Treatment Network sites also offer families the option of participating in a data registry used to track children with the disorders. "Developing common standards of medical care across 15 sites will allow us to get answers to the questions parents ask about their children's care much more quickly," Dr. James Perrin, director of the clinical coordinating center for the Autism Treatment Network, said in a statement. Autism Speaks began the network effort in 2005 at five sites, which provide services to about 2,000 new cases of autism spectrum disorders each year.

FDA Can't Fulfill Its Mission

The Food and Drug Administration "suffers from serious scientific deficiencies and is not positioned to meet current or emerging regulatory responsibilities," according to a report by three members of the agency's Science Board. The FDA has become weak and unable to fulfill its mission because of the increasing number of demands and an inability to respond because of a lack of resources, they said. "FDA's inability to keep up with scientific advances means that American lives are at risk," wrote the panelists, adding that the agency can't fulfill its mission "without substantial and sustained additional appropriations." The report was written by Gail Cassell, Ph.D., vice president of scientific affairs at Eli Lilly & Co.; Dr. Allen D. Roses, Jefferson Pilot Corp. Professor of Neurobiology and Genetics at Duke University, Durham, N.C.; and Dr. Barbara J. McNeil, head of the health care policy department at Harvard Medical School, Boston.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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