POLICY & PRACTICE

Addressing Neurologic Emergencies

The University of Michigan and the National Institutes of Health recently launched the Neurological Emergencies Treatment Trials (NETT) Network, which will be funded by a $7.7 million grant from the NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, will serve as the coordinating center for the network, and is joined by 11 other research hubs at major medical centers. "Our mission is to improve outcomes of patients with acute neurological problems through innovative research focused on patient care that starts in the ambulance and in the emergency department," Dr. William G. Barsan, chair of the department of emergency medicine at the university, said in a statement. "NETT will give us the framework to test medications, patient management strategies, and other treatments on a large scale and over a short timeframe." The first NETT trial is scheduled to begin later this year, pending a waiver of informed consent from the Food and Drug Administration, and will focus on patients who experience status epilepticus.

NINDS Gains New Leadership

Neurologist and researcher Dr. Walter J. Koroshetz has been named deputy director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Dr. Koroshetz, formerly vice chair of the neurology service and director of stroke and neurointensive care services at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, will work on program planning and budgeting in his new post. Dr. Koroshetz has received NINDS extramural funding for his research on Huntington's disease, neuroprotection, and translational research in acute stroke. "Dr. Koroshetz is an internationally renowned neurologist and outstanding investigator and administrator," NINDS Director Story Landis, Ph.D., said in a statement. "His leadership skills and recognized expertise in stroke, imaging, training, and neurointensive care will serve the Institute well."

Stroke Legislation Reintroduced

Lawmakers once again are trying to pass legislation to raise public awareness of stroke. Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.) and Rep. Chip Pickering (R-Miss.) introduced the Stroke Treatment and Ongoing Prevention Act of 2007 last month. The bill calls for public education efforts to increase awareness of the warning signs of stroke and the need to treat it as a medical emergency. The legislation, H.R. 477, also directs the Health and Human Services secretary to make grants available for developing residency training materials and other continuing education materials for health care providers. It was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Dr. Larry Goldstein, chair of the American Stroke Association's Stroke Council, praised the introduction of the legislation and urged the congressional leadership to make the passage of the bill a top priority. Rep. Capps and Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) introduced similar legislation in the last Congress, but the bills stalled in committee.

FDA Proposes Bovine Ban

Food and Drug Administration officials are proposing to limit the use of cattle materials in drugs and medical devices in an effort to reduce the potential risk of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The idea is to keep medical products free of the agent that is believed to cause bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The proposal would cover prescription, over-the-counter, and homeopathic drugs, biologics, and medical devices intended for use in humans; it also includes drugs intended for use in ruminant animals. FDA officials plan to enforce the rules by requiring companies to keep detailed records about which cattle materials were used as ingredients in medical products. At press time, officials at the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America were still reviewing the proposal.

More EHRs Obtain Certification

The Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT) has given its stamp of approval to 18 more electronic health record products for office-based physicians, bringing the number of certified products to 55, or about 25% of companies in the market, according to a CCHIT estimate. Among the next steps at CCHIT is the expansion of EHR certification to products that cater specifically to certain professional specialties, care settings, and patient populations. "Electronic health record companies have stepped up to the plate, ensuring that their products meet CCHIT criteria and actively promoting certification as a mark of excellence," Dr. Mark Leavitt, chairman of CCHIT, said in a statement. "The benefits of certification will increase as we continue to raise the standards of functionality, interoperability, and security." A full list of certified products is available online at www.cchit.org.

—Mary Ellen Schneider