



## POLICY & PRACTICE

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### Social Media Warrant Watching

Pediatricians should add social media to their list of topics on which to counsel parents and children during visits, the American Academy of Pediatrics said in a new statement. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter can enhance communication and help teens develop socially and technically, according to the statement.

However, tweens and teens also can find themselves in situations online that aren't age appropriate and that may lead to "cyberbullying," depression from feelings that their lives aren't as good as those of their friends, sexting, and exposure to inappropriate content, the AAP said.

Pediatricians should help families understand the risks and benefits involved and should guide patients and parents to healthy uses of social media, the AAP said in its statement.

### Kids Characterize Good Taste

The presence of a popular-media character on a cereal box can directly affect a child's taste preference, according to a report in the March issue of Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine. In the study, 80 children aged 4-6 years rated the flavor of a cereal going by the name "Healthy Bits" or "Sugar Bits" in the experiment. On average, children preferred cereal from a box showing baby penguins from the movie "Happy Feet" versus the same cereal from a character-free box. Children also preferred cereal labeled Healthy Bits versus Sugar Bits, but the characters were a more powerful influence on the children.

The researchers concluded that messages of healthy eating may be resonating with children, but media characters override that influence.

### Fresh-Produce Program Grows

The Department of Agriculture will expand a program that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income children at their schools. In 2011, the effort will provide \$158 million to state agencies, up from \$101 million in 2010, according to the department. The states select schools to participate, and there each student receives \$50-\$75 worth of fresh produce during the school year. The agency said the expanded assistance could serve an additional 600,000 to 950,000 students this year.

### Group Warns on Gun Bills

Legislation under consideration in Florida would hinder the efforts of pediatricians to protect children from gun-related injuries, the AAP warned. As of mid-April, both houses of the Florida legislature were considering bills that would prohibit physicians from asking patients and families about gun ownership and from adding information on household guns to a patient's medical records. Physicians who inquired about guns anyway could be subject to fines

and state medical board sanctions. The AAP noted in a statement that pediatricians often are first to spot children, teens, and young adults at risk for suicide and that firearms in the home increase suicide risk.

"If the government begins to restrict the trust and confidentiality between a physician, a patient, and – for children –

a patient's parents, then the health and well-being of patients is placed in jeopardy," said AAP president O. Marion Burton in the statement. "Tragedies that could have been prevented by a simple conversation will, instead, occur."

### Insurer Pays for Terminations

BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois has agreed to pay the federal government \$9.5 million and the state of Illinois \$14.25 million to settle charges that the insurer wrongfully terminated coverage of private duty skilled nursing care for medically fragile, technologically depen-

dent children in order to shift costs to the state's Medicaid program. According to the settlement, the Illinois Blues denied patient claims based on secret internal guidelines.

In addition, the insurer improperly told policyholders that children were not covered for private duty nursing during reviews of denied claims, the U.S. Department of Justice had charged. Under the agreement, the insurer will pay an additional \$1.25 million to Illinois to settle allegations under the state consumer fraud statute.

–Jane Anderson

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