POLICY & PRACTICE

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Another Planned Parenthood Cut

North Carolina's new budget strips all funding for Planned Parenthood clinics in the state. Lawmakers there recently overrode a veto from Gov. Bev Perdue (D) to enact the cut that Planned Parenthood said would amount to $434,000 used for family planning services and teen pregnancy prevention initiatives.

Although Planned Parenthood facilitates abortions, none of the North Carolina funding went to such procedures. The organization is weighing its options, including a possible lawsuit, Planned Parenthood official Melissa Reed said in a statement. North Carolina follows Indiana and Kansas in defunding Planned Parenthood clinics.

Midwives Needed Globally

Up to 3.6 million maternal, fetal, and neonatal deaths could be avoided each year if more midwives were available in 58 developing countries surveyed for the United Nations Population Fund's "The State of the World's Midwifery 2011" report.

"The report points to an urgent need to train more health workers with midwifery skills and ensure equitable access to their life-saving services in communities to improve the health of women and children," Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund, said in a statement.

More than 110,000 midwives are needed in the 38 countries with severe shortages of health care workers, according to the survey. The full report is available at www.unfpa.org/sowmy/resources/en/main.htm.

FDA Warns on Thermography

Officials at the Food and Drug Administration are warning women and their physicians that thermography should not be used as a stand-alone test for the early detection of breast cancer.

Some facilities and websites are making misleading claims, including that thermography can detect precancerous abnormalities and that compressing the breast during mammography can cause or spread cancer throughout the body, according to the FDA.

"The FDA is not aware of any valid scientific data to show that thermographic devices, when used on their own, are an effective screening tool for any medical condition," the announcement said.

Formula Ads Win FDA OK

The FDA granted permission for Gerber Products to make a "qualified health claim" that the company's Good Start infant formulas may reduce the risk of atopic dermatitis. The milk-based formulas contain 100% partially hydrolyzed whey protein. The products' labels can say that feeding infants the formula up to age 4 months "may reduce the risk of developing atopic dermatitis throughout the first year of life," according to a company announcement.

However, the labels have to add that "FDA has concluded that the relationship between 100% whey protein partially hydrolyzed infant formulas and the reduced risk of atopic dermatitis is uncertain, because there is

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little scientific evidence for the relationship."

In a blog post, Ricardo Carvajal of the law firm Hyman, Phelps & McNamara said that the label claim appears weak, but he noted that Gerber took out a full-page ad in the New York Times touting the FDA-approved claim.

Single-Specialty Groups Pay Best

Primary care physicians received a median first-year guaranteed salary of $172,400 in single-specialty group practices in 2010, according to a Medical Group Management Association survey. That's more than 4% higher than the median first-year guaranteed salary ($165,000) that primary care physicians received in multispecialty practices, the report said.

First-year compensation for primary care didn't vary much geographically, according to MGMA. More than half the physicians received signing bonuses and relocation packages as part of their employment offers, and 12% received loan-forgiveness packages.

Employers were more likely to offer loan-forgiveness packages to primary care physicians than to specialists, and most such packages totaled $50,000 or less, according to the survey.

Bill Seeks to Repeal Tan Tax

A Republican congressman and 24 cosponsors have introduced a bill to repeal the 10% "regressive tax" on tanning services that was part of the Affordable Care Act.

"The health care law unfairly imposes onerous taxes, like the tan tax, on our nation's business owners and consumers, slowing economic growth and costing jobs," the bill's sponsor, Rep. Michael Grimm (R-N.Y.), said in a statement. The Indoor Tanning Association supports the bill, as does the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the National Taxpayers Union, Rep. Grimm said.

The tanning group's president, Dan Humiston, said in a statement, "In reality, this tax takes money out of the pockets of some of those least able to afford it: working women, who are not only customers but also make up a majority of our business owners; and college students, who are both customers and employees."

–Mary Ellen Schneider