Policy & Practice

Payment and Access to Imaging

Endocrinologists gained a powerful ally in the fight to stop impending cuts to the Medicare technical payments for in-office imaging services when the delegates to the American Medical Association's annual meeting voted in June to support the delay or repeal of the cuts. The Deficit Reduction Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 2005 (section 5102) calls for reducing the technical component payment, including the technical component of the global payment, for imaging services under the physician fee schedule if the service exceeds the hospital outpatient department payment amount under Medicare. These cuts are scheduled to take effect in January 2007 and would apply to imaging and computer-assisted imaging services, including x-rays, ultrasound, nuclear medicine, magnetic resonance imaging, computer tomography, and fluoroscopy. If the cuts go into effect, some physicians will be forced to discontinue providing in-office imaging services, which would, in turn, limit patient access and increase wait times for imaging, according to the AMA resolution. The resolution was introduced by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists.

Diabetes Patient Care Survey

Type 2 diabetes patients say they know a lot more about their disease than their physicians say they do, according to an online survey commissioned by the American Association of Diabetes Educators. The Harris Interactive survey of 784 adult type 2 patients and 406 primary care physicians who see at least three type 2 patients per month found that while 83% of patients who say they are on a healthy, balanced diet think they follow their health care provider's instructions on diet "well" or "very well," only 29% of physicians believe this to be true of their type 2 patients. Also, 55% of patients surveyed didn't know their hemoglobin A_{1c} level, have not had it checked in the past 6 months, or are unsure if they've had it tested, according to the survey. "The survey shows a glaring information gap between what patients think they know about self-management of their disease and what doctors think patients actually know," Dr. Sethu K. Reddy, chairman of the department of endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism at the Cleveland Clinic, said at a press conference. The survey was sponsored by a grant from Merck & Co.

Smoking and Obesity: Bad Combo

The proportion of U.S. citizens who are both cigarette smokers and obese is higher among low-income populations, according to a study by Cheryl G. Healton, Dr.P.H., of Columbia University and colleagues. The researchers used data from a national health interview survey of more than 29,000 adults to estimate how many people were both smokers and obese. They found that overall, 5.3% of men and 4.2% of women were both—about 9 million people altogether. "This proportion is higher in African Americans than in other racial or ethnic groups," the authors wrote. "A greater proportion of people with lower income and education levels smoke and are obese." The authors called for treatments to be developed to target this patient group. The study was funded by the American Legacy Foundation; Dr. Healton is the group's president and CEO.

Global Diabetes Campaign

The International Diabetes Federation has launched a global campaign to highlight the "alarming rise" of diabetes worldwide and encourage government support for a United Nations resolution on diabetes. The "Unite for Diabetes" campaign will try to get a resolution passed on or around World Diabetes Day on Nov. 14, 2007. "The number of people living with diabetes is expected to grow to 350 million in less than 20 years if action is not taken," the campaign noted in a press release. "If nothing is done, diabetes will place severe economic, social, and health burdens on the countries that can least afford it." Dr. Martin Silink, president-elect of the federation, noted that "The diabetes epidemic will overwhelm health care resources everywhere if governments do not wake up and take action now."

Rapid Response Teams Cut Deaths

An 18-month campaign to get hospitals to adopt quality control measures has saved more than 100,000 lives. That's according to estimates by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the nonprofit organization behind the campaign. The IHI bases its estimates on raw mortality data from inpatient admissions only, which is submitted to the organization by participating hospitals. So far, at least 3,000 hospitals have signed up to participate. They agreed to implement some or all of a checklist of six quality improvement initiatives, including establishing rapid response teams that are activated when a patient's condition is deemed to be worsening.

—Joyce Frieden