Policy & Practice

Majority of TBIs Are Pediatric

Children and teens ages 5-18 years account for more than half of the 207,830 traumatic brain injuries related to sports or recreation that are treated in U.S. emergency departments each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This population is at increased risk for concussion during sports and recreational activities, as well as long-term sequelae, delayed recovery, and cumulative consequences of multiple traumatic brain injuries, CDC researchers wrote in the July 27 issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. The activities associated with the greatest number of visits to the ED for traumatic brain injuries in this population included bicycling, football, playground activities, basketball, and soccer. The results are based on data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System—All Injury Program from 2001-2005. More information on traumatic brain injury, including physician tool kits, is available online at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/tbi.htm.

New Stem Cell Legislation Introduced

Members of Congress recently introduced legislation aimed at increasing research into stem cells without the creation or destruction of human embryos for research purposes. The bill, the "Patients First Act of 2007" (H.R. 2807) was introduced by Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) and Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-Ill.). The legislation directs the Department of Health and Human Services to support basic and applied stem cell research that does not involve the creation of a human embryo for research purposes or the destruction or discarding of a living human embryo. It also calls on the HHS secretary to submit a report to Congress detailing the funding of stem cell research. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce

APhA Urges Delay in Rx Rule

The American Pharmacists Association and three lawmakers have urged CMS to delay implementation of a new federal mandate requiring the use of tamper-resistant prescription pads for all Medicaid prescriptions beginning Oct. 1. Although many states have similar requirements, it will take much longer than 3 months to roll out such a program across the country, said APhA executive vice president and CEO John Gans in a statement. The three lawmakers—Rep. Charlie Wilson (D-Ohio), Rep. Marion Berry (D-Ark.), and Rep. Mike Ross (D-Ark.)—say that most physicians do not currently use this type of pads, nor are supplies readily available. "The tamperproof pad law was designed to prevent Medicaid fraud," the legislators said in a statement. "However, the timeline for implementation could result in patients being turned away from their pharmacies as of Oct. 1, 2007, if doctors fail to write prescriptions on 'tamper-resistant' paper." The congressmen have introduced a bill that would require only prescriptions for Class II narcotics to be written on the tamperproof prescription pads.

E-Prescribing Called 'Win-Win'

Electronic prescribing could prevent nearly 2 million medication errors and save the federal government $26 billion over the next decade—even after providing funds for equipment, training, and support—if physicians were required to use the technology for their Medicare patients, according to a study released by the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association. The study found that when physicians use e-prescribing to learn their patients' medication history and prescription choices, both patient safety and savings improve dramatically. However, fewer than 1 in 10 physicians actually use e-prescribing, according to PCMA. The group, which represents pharmacy benefit managers, is pushing the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to require e-prescribing for all Medicare Part D prescriptions by 2010.

Most Substance Abusers Work

A new survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration shows that most of the nation's 16.4 million illicit drug users and 15 million heavy alcohol users are employed full time. The report, available at SAMHSA's Web site, is compiled from the 2002, 2003, and 2004 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health. The data are somewhat misleading because full-time workers account for two-thirds of the survey population, according to SAMHSA. Illicit drug use was highest, at 19%, among the cohort aged 18-25 years, compared with 10% for those aged 26-34 years, 7% for those aged 35-49 years, and 3% for those aged 50-64 years. The highest rates of current use were among food service workers (17%) and construction workers (15%). Alcohol use was highest among construction, mining, excavation, and drilling workers (18%), and installation, maintenance, and repair workers (15%).

—Mary Ellen Schneider