Policy & Practice

Principles for Physician Ranking

As more insurers begin using physician rankings, the American Academy of Neurology Professional Association (AANPA), which coordinates all advocacy and medical economics activities for members of the American Academy of Neurology, recently issued a set of principles to ensure "clarity and fairness" in the design of physician ranking programs. For starters, AANPA would like a seat at the table to provide input into the development, implementation, and evaluation of any physician profiling or ranking arrangements that involve neurologists. The group is also seeking disclosure of the methods used to collect and analyze performance data and details about pilot studies to validate physician rankings prior to their use. In addition, AANPA is calling on insurers to create a process through which physicians could dispute their ranking before it is made public. The principles also urge insurers to use established national standards in evaluating physicians, such as measures endorsed by the National Quality Forum. "The AANPA recognizes that there can be benefit in physician profiling programs when they are transparent to those profiled; use only measures, data, and procedures of proven validity; and are overseen by an independent national oversight organization," the group said in its position statement.

Fox Foundation Awards $1.1 Million

In the first half of this year, the Michael J. Fox Foundation awarded $1.1 million in grants for Parkinson's disease research projects as part of its "rapid response" program. The organization expects to award nearly another $1 million before the end of 2008. The Rapid Response Innovation Awards program, launched in 2007, accepts proposals on a rolling basis and makes funding decisions within 6 weeks of receiving an application. Researchers can get up to $75,000 for a 1-year basic, preclinical, or clinical research project for any work that is relevant to Parkinson's disease. "Rapid Response infuses capital quickly into exciting new ideas that could open up important new avenues of inquiry for Parkinson's disease," Katie Hood, CEO of the Michael J. Fox Foundation, said in a statement. "Our goal is to provide the funding needed to further 'build the case' for these new concepts, developing the data required before other traditional funding sources can step in." This year, the organization has funded research into the use of gene silencing techniques and pluripotent stem cell technology. Other grantees are working on better treatments for digestive problems in Parkinson's and studying epidemiological findings that have shown that smoking may protect against Parkinson's disease.

NIH Funds Chronic Disease Training

The National Institutes of Health is launching a $1.5 million-a-year grant program to fund the training of researchers who will combat chronic diseases in developing countries. NIH officials are seeking to build a cadre of researchers who can find better ways to treat stroke, cancer, lung disease, obesity, and other conditions in low- to middle-income countries where deaths from chronic diseases are common. As part of the program, grantees would receive funding of up to $220,000 a year for up to 5 years to train researchers. Among the objectives of the project is to train researchers who can identify the economic factors that influence chronic disease risk and take research findings and translate them into policies and programs of care.

—Mary Ellen Schneider