POLICY & PRACTICE

Almost 50 million by 2050?

The number of Americans with diabetes may nearly triple by the year 2050, according to an article in the September issue of Diabetes Care. "We now project 48.3 million people with diagnosed diabetes in the U.S. in 2050," up from 16.2 million in 2005, according to Dr. K.M. Venkat Narayan and colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With projected increases in the population in the intervening years, the increase would mean the percentage of Americans with diagnosed diabetes would increase from 5.62% to 12%, the authors wrote. They noted that earlier projections suggested that there would be only 39 million people with diagnosed diabetes by 2050. "If incidence rates continue to rise, the impact on future numbers with diabetes, and consequent health care costs, will be much more devastating. Implementation of evidence-based primary prevention is thus an urgent national priority," the authors said.

Grants Target Artificial Pancreas

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation is issuing nearly $6 million in grants aimed at getting researchers closer to developing an artificial pancreas. "We believe that the new continuous glucose sensors will dramatically improve the ability of people with type 1 diabetes to control the wide fluctuations of glucose levels that, over time, lead to severe complications like heart attacks, kidney failure, amputations, and blindness," said Dr. Richard Insel, the foundation's executive vice president of research. "These grants will help us better understand and quantify the benefits of technology-enabled glucose control, and take a big step toward an artificial pancreas." The first year's funding for the Artificial Pancreas Project, which was launched in late 2005, includes a multisite clinical trial comparing health outcomes in patients with type 1 diabetes who use continuous glucose sensors with type 1 patients who do not use the sensors. The project also is funding the multisite Artificial Pancreas Consortium, which is working on algorithms for a closed-loop system linking a glucose sensor with an insulin pump.

Views on Medicare Part D

Most physicians agree that the Medicare Part D drug benefit is saving money for patients, but they see the law as too complicated, according to a poll commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Seventy-one percent of physicians surveyed somewhat or strongly agreed that the programs help people on Medicare save money, while 92% somewhat or strongly agreed that it is too complicated. And 64% of physicians agreed that it benefits private health plans and pharmaceutical companies too much, according to the results of the Kaiser survey. Physicians also reported that the program increased their day-to-day hassles. About 64% of physicians reported that the Medicare drug program put a lot or some burden on themselves or their staff, compared with 33% who reported not much or no burden associated with the Part D benefit. The survey, conducted between April and July, is based on a nationally representative sample of 834 office-based physicians involved in direct adult patient care.

Raising Paget's Disease Awareness

Officials at the National Institutes of Health are aiming to get seniors better informed about Paget's disease of bone by adding information on the condition to the agency's senior health Web site. The site—www.NIHSeniorHealth.gov—was designed by the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine to offer health information to older adults. Officials plan to add information on clinical trials, nutrition, and falls to the Web site in the future. The new information on Paget's disease includes symptoms and complications; information on diagnosis, treatment, and research; and a link to Medline Plus information on the condition. Providing such medically accurate information is especially important since about 60% of seniors who have Internet access seek health information when they go online, according to the NIH.

Fewer Docs Accept Medicaid

The proportion of physicians who accept Medicaid patients has decreased in the last 10 years, according to a study by the Washington-based Center for Studying Health System Change. During 1996-1997, 13% of physicians reported no Medicaid revenue. By 2004, 15% said they did not accept Medicaid. Similarly, the percentage of physicians accepting no new Medicaid patients had stayed steady, at 19% in 1996, compared with 21% in 2004. That is a substantial difference from the numbers of physicians who in 2004 said they accept all new private-pay patients (71%) or all new Medicare patients (73%). The data come from the center's Community Tracking Study Physician Survey. The top reasons for not accepting new Medicaid patients: inadequate reimbursement, billing and paperwork hassles, and delayed reimbursement.

—Joyce Frieden