POLICY & PRACTICE

Fall-Related Injury Legislation

President Bush recently signed legislation to prevent falls among the elderly. The Safety of Seniors Act of 2008 (H.R. 3701) directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct and support research to improve the identification of older adults who may be at risk for falling, develop and evaluate effective fall prevention interventions, and improve the diagnosis and treatment of fall victims. The legislation, introduced by Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-N.J.), also calls on HHS to report to Congress on the potential for reducing falls and the most effective strategies for reducing the health care costs associated with falls. The legislation also includes a national public education campaign aimed at older adults and health care providers that would focus on reducing falls and preventing repeat falls. "Effective demonstration tests, comprehensive public information and education campaigns can help reduce and mitigate these avoidable and frequently disabling injuries," Rep. Pallone said in a statement. "This new law launches a comprehensive preventative care program to reduce the number and severity of falls to the elderly."

Feds Develop Lupus Campaign

The federal government is developing a National Lupus Awareness campaign to increase the public's understanding of lupus symptoms, its health effects, and who is at risk for the condition. The marketing campaign also aims to raise awareness that lupus disproportionately affects young women of color. The project is being spearheaded by the Office of Women's Health, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, with support from the Advertising Council. Officials in the Office of Women's Health are also seeking lupus and women's health organizations to partner with on the project. The campaign will target the low public recognition of lupus that was documented by the Lupus Foundation of America in a recent survey. The group found that among 1,000 U.S. adults, 39% knew nothing about the disease and 22% had never even heard of it.

Arthritis Creates Exercise Barrier

Comorbid arthritis is a significant barrier to exercise for people with diabetes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. The agency's national survey found that 30% of people who have both disorders are physically inactive, compared with 21% of those who have only diabetes and 17% of those who have only arthritis. "These findings suggest that more needs to be done to help people with diabetes and arthritis get physically active to improve their health," Dr. Chad Helmick, coauthor of the study and a CDC medical epidemiologist, said in a statement. "Engaging in regular physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight can help alleviate the pain and disability that often accompany arthritis." The CDC based its report on 2005 and 2007 data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. This state-based random telephone survey has been tracking health conditions and risk behaviors in the United States yearly since 1984. The data from 2005 and 2007 were combined to increase statistical power.

FDA Pushes for Adverse Event Reports

The Food and Drug Administration is working with a medical software firm to get more physicians to submit adverse event reports to the agency. Doctors who use Epocrates products received a message on their personal digital assistant explaining how adverse event reporting works. "Physicians are on the frontline when it comes to patient care, and working with Epocrates helps us remind them of safety and error reporting directly at the point of patient contact," said Dr. Norman Marks, medical director of the FDA's MedWatch program. "We want physicians to understand that by taking a few minutes to submit a report, that action may be the necessary first step that triggers an evaluation and action by the FDA."

Low Postmarket Compliance

The FDA has issued its annual summary report on whether pharmaceutical and biologic manufacturers are meeting their commitments to conduct postmarketing studies. According to the agency, 76% of drug makers and 81% of biologic makers had met their commitment as of Sept. 30, 2007. There were 136 drug makers and 54 biologic manufacturers with open postmarketing commitments as of that date. A closer look shows that only 12% of drug studies were completed or terminated with a final report submitted to the FDA that year. In all, 20% of biologics met that goal. Manufacturers must report annually on the status of safety, efficacy, pharmacology, and nonclinical toxicology studies required by the FDA, or report that they have committed to conduct at the time of approval or after approval.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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