POLICY & PRACTICE

Osteoporosis: Women's Disease?

Women aged 30 years and older are more likely to report being at risk for osteoporosis than are men and young adults, according to a study published in the October issue of Health Education & Behavior. In a study of 300 men and women across a range of age groups (18-25, 30-50, and 50-plus), the researchers used the Osteoporosis Health Belief Scale to gauge participants' perceptions about their susceptibility to osteoporosis, the seriousness of the condition, and their motivation to make changes to their health behaviors. The 35-item, self-report questionnaire grades responses on a 5-point scale. The responses revealed that women aged 30-50 years and women aged 50 and older had the highest susceptibility scores. Men aged 18-25 years had the lowest susceptibility scores, according to the study. However, the scores related to the seriousness of the condition and the motivation to change health behaviors were not significantly different among the various groups. The finding suggests that men and women of all ages may be unaware of the serious consequences of osteoporosis, the researchers wrote.

ADA Revisions Pass Congress

Both Houses of Congress have passed the Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments Act, which reverses three Supreme Court decisions that restricted the ADA's jurisdiction. The legislation, which President Bush was expected to sign at press time, prohibits the consideration of measures that reduce or mitigate the impact of impairment—such as medication, prosthetics, and assistive technology—in determining whether an individual has a disability; covers workers whose employers discriminate against them based on a perception that the worker is impaired, regardless of whether the worker has a disability; and makes it clear that the ADA provides broad coverage to protect anyone who faces discrimination on the basis of disability. The American Diabetes Association praised the bill's passage, noting that many people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes have found themselves no longer covered by the act. "Overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress realized the merit of this historic legislation. They acknowledged that the proposed act strengthens fundamental protections for Americans with disabilities yet also has been recognized as manageable by prominent representatives of U.S. employers," said Dan Kohrman, chair of the association's legal advocacy subcommittee.

Uninsured Spend $30B on Care

Americans who lack health insurance for any part of 2008 will spend $30 billion out of pocket for health services and also receive $56 billion in uncompensated care while uninsured, according to a study in Health Affairs. Government programs will pay for about $43 billion for the uncompensated care, the researchers reported. Compared with people who have full-year private health care coverage, people who are uninsured for a full year receive less than half as much care but pay a larger share out of pocket, the authors reported. Someone who is uninsured all year would pay 35%, or $583 on average, out of pocket toward average annual medical costs of $1,686, the study said. In contrast, annual medical costs of the privately insured average $3,915, with 17%, or $681 on average, paid out of pocket, according to the study.

HHS Privacy Efforts Lacking

The Health and Human Services department has taken some steps to safeguard patient privacy, but efforts in several areas are still lacking, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office. The report notes that although HHS has made progress in developing a confidentiality, security, and privacy framework for health records, it has looked at some areas only in a narrow view. For example, the agency's efforts at harmonizing certification and standards mostly address technical issues such as data encryption and password protections, while the recommendations submitted by the HHS's advisory committees are primarily aimed at policy and legal issues. In response, the report noted that "HHS agreed that more work remains to be done in the department's efforts to protect the privacy of electronic personal health information and stated that it is actively pursuing a two-phased process for assessing and prioritizing privacy-related initiatives intended to build public trust and confidence in health IT, particularly in electronic health information exchange."

Part B Premiums Same for 2009

Medicare beneficiaries won't have to reach any deeper into their wallets to pay their Part B premiums and deductibles next year. Officials at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that the 2009 standard Part B monthly premiums will be the same as in 2008—$96.40. This is the first time since 2000 that the standard Part B premium has not increased over the previous year, according to the CMS.

—Joyce Frieden