

## POLICY &amp; PRACTICE

## Helping Hand to Physicians

The American Medical Association Foundation is offering grants to help physicians affected by Hurricane Katrina and Rita rebuild their medical practices. The Foundation has set up the Health Care Recovery Fund, which will award grants in this and future natural and man-made disasters. Physicians are eligible for the grants if their practices were damaged or destroyed in areas declared disaster zones by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Physicians do not need to be AMA members to receive the grants. The

AMA has given \$100,000 as seed money for the fund, and the AMA Foundation will accept donations by mail to the fund. Applications are available at [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org).

## Protesting Pay Cuts

The American College of Cardiology, the Heart Rhythm Society, and more than 100 other medical specialty groups are urging Congress to step in to stop expected cuts in the Medicare physician payments for 2006. Physicians will face a 4.4% pay cut on Jan. 1, 2006, unless Congress

acts to impose a fix. In a letter to congressional leaders, the group pointed out that other health care providers and institutions will get pay increases next year including home health providers (2.5% increase), hospitals (3.7%), and nursing homes (3.1%). "Only physicians are subject to the flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula, which produces negative updates because it is tied to the ups and downs of the national economy, specifically the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—and not to the health care needs of seniors and disabled patients or the cost of providing care to them," the groups said in the letter.

## Health Care Rankings

Health care quality improved markedly in many key areas in 2004, but only about 22% of the industry now reports publicly on its performance, according to the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) annual State of Health Care Quality report. Among the 289 commercial health plans that reported their data, average performance improved on 18 of 22 clinical measures, although Medicare and Medicaid plans reported smaller gains. Improvements in measures related to high blood pressure control were made in 2004, (up 5 points, to 67%) along with cholesterol control for people with diabetes (up 4 points, to 65%). Fewer patients are enrolled in plans that publicly report their data, due largely to shifting enrollment patterns, the NCQA reported. Enrollment in preferred provider organizations and consumer-directed health plans is up sharply, and these plans tend not to measure or report on their performance. "Today we see a lot of health plans that aren't measuring anything. The right response as a consumer to these plans is simply, don't buy them," said NCQA President Margaret E. O'Kane. "The new mantra for health care purchasers needs to be, 'Show us your data.' Why trust your family's health to an organization that operates behind closed doors?" As many as 67,000 deaths have been prevented to date as a result of improvements recorded over the last 6 years.

## TRANSLATING THE LATEST FINDINGS INTO CLINICAL PRACTICE

nature  
CLINICAL  
PRACTICE **CARDIOVASCULAR  
MEDICINE**

Editor-in-Chief: Valentin Fuster, MD, PhD



Launched in November 2004 by the publishers of *Nature*, **Nature Clinical Practice Cardiovascular Medicine** delivers timely, authoritative interpretations of key research developments, translating the latest findings into clinical practice.

Articles include editorials and opinion pieces from leading authorities, highlights from the current literature, expert commentaries on the application of recent research findings to practical patient care, comprehensive reviews, and in-depth case studies.

Our Editor-in-Chief, Valentin Fuster, MD, PhD, and an international Advisory Board ensure broad coverage across the specialty of current developments throughout the year, reflecting the highest standards of editorial quality and integrity that are hallmarks of Nature Publishing Group.

Only \$96 per year (12 issues) for a personal subscription in print and online.

Visit us online at: [www.nature.com/clinicalpractice](http://www.nature.com/clinicalpractice) for more information and to subscribe at a **special 25% discount**.

To receive your 25% discount when subscribing online please do the following:

- 1 Go to [www.nature.com/clinicalpractice](http://www.nature.com/clinicalpractice).
- 2 Click "SUBSCRIBE" at the upper right.
- 3 Click the journal title.
- 4 Enter the special offer code 5C1105DNG in the space provided.
- 5 Click "Update Price".
- 6 Click "Continue to Payment" and enter your payment details as indicated.

[www.nature.com/clinicalpractice](http://www.nature.com/clinicalpractice)

nature publishing group 

## von Eschenbach to FDA

Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D., has been named acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, following the resignation of Lester Crawford, D.V.M., Ph.D. Dr. von Eschenbach served as head of the National Cancer Institute prior to his appointment. "As a practicing physician and research scientist, I share in the critical mission of this agency in protecting and promoting the health of the American people," he said in a statement. Dr. Crawford had a 30-year career with the agency, serving as its deputy commissioner and director of the Center for Veterinary Medicine, among other posts. "It is time at the age of 67, to step aside," he said.

## Chronic Disease Epidemic

The World Health Organization is calling on both the public and private sectors throughout the world to help stem the trend of chronic disease deaths. In a new report, WHO outlines a global goal of reducing deaths from chronic disease by 2% each year until 2015. This would prevent 36 million deaths in the next 10 years, nearly half in people younger than 70, according to WHO. Some inexpensive and cost-effective solutions to tackle preventable risk factors include salt reduction in processed foods, improved school meals, and taxation of tobacco products, according to the WHO report. "This is a very serious situation, both for public health and for the societies and economies affected, and the toll is projected to increase," WHO Director-General Lee Jong-wook, M.D., said in a statement. "The cost of inaction is clear and unacceptable. It is vital that countries review and implement the health actions we know will reduce premature death from chronic diseases."

—Mary Ellen Schneider