

## POLICY & PRACTICE

### Increase in Pediatric Labeling

Incentives to encourage pediatric studies and subsequent labeling are working, according to a report from the Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development. Nearly 100 medicines for sale in the United States have received pediatric labeling since the late 1990s, based on new clinical studies to determine appropriate dosages, safety, efficacy, and formulations for children, the report said. "The increase in pediatric labeling signals a major advance in pediatric medicine," said Christopher Milne, assistant director of the center and author of the study. The federal Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act of 2001 seems responsible for this increase. The law granted extended patent exclusivity to drug companies willing to conduct pediatric studies on new or already approved drugs, and established time frames to expedite label changes. Prior to the law's enactment, 70% of drugs used in children had been dispensed without adequate pediatric dosing information, according to the Tufts analysis. Limited return on investment, difficulty enrolling and studying pediatric patients, and liability concerns previously discouraged drugmakers from conducting pediatric studies.

### AAP Urges Sex Education

Pediatricians should encourage adolescents to postpone early sexual activity and encourage parents to educate their children and adolescents about sexual development, responsible sexuality, decision making, and values, the American Academy of Pediatrics stated in a clinical report that updates its policy on unintended teen pregnancy. While adolescent pregnancy and birth rates have steadily declined in the past 13 years, many teens still become pregnant, the report stated. Teaching young people about contraceptives does not increase sexual activity and improves teens' knowledge about access to reproductive health, the report emphasized. However, the conservative advocacy group Focus on the Family thought the report didn't go far enough to encourage abstinence. "It is inappropriate that the AAP leadership should advise policies that promote anything less than the most healthy, responsible behavior for our children," said Marilyn A. Maxwell, M.D., a member of the AAP and of Focus on the Family's Physicians Resource Council.

### Soft Drink Wars Focus on Sugar

The Center for Science in the Public Interest is targeting the public's consumption of soft drinks, something the group labels as "liquid candy." Data show teenagers are drinking more high-calorie soft drinks than ever before, and less diet soda than in years past, the group stated. In a petition, the CSPI called on the Food and Drug Administration to require a series of rotating health notices on containers of all nondiet soft drinks (carbonated and noncarbonated) that contain more than 13 grams of refined sugars per 12 ounces. In a statement, Susan Neely, president and chief executive officer of the American Beverage Association, said she thought the CSPI's proposed warning labels on soft drinks patronized consumers and lacked common sense. "Even skim milk and thousands of

other food products could potentially fit into a CSPI labeling scheme because of the sugars in those products," she said.

### Youth Concerned About Health

Most young people believe it's important to pay attention to their health. A survey of 1,278 youth aged 10-17 years conducted by Harris Interactive found that 92% cared about this issue, although many acknowledged that they might not be leading the healthiest lifestyles and that daily stress was a major contributor. More than half of those surveyed admitted that there were a lot of things they did that weren't healthy and 84% confessed to eating junk food after school. Only 19% didn't think they needed to worry about their health because they were young. The poll was taken on behalf of America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth, an advocacy group whose members work to ensure that young people meet their potential.

### Health Insurance Statistics

Health insurance coverage for children continues to improve: Seven million children under 18 years of age were without health insurance in 2004, compared with 10 million children in 1997, according to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. Among poor and near-poor children, lack of coverage dropped by about a third from 1997. For near-poor children, public coverage almost doubled from 24% to 43% between 1997 and 2004. In general, the ranks of the uninsured appear to be leveling off. In 2004, 42 million Americans of all ages were without health insurance, about the same level as in 1997, the first year this survey began tracking these statistics. In addition, one in five adults aged 18-64 years were without health insurance last year, a number that had been steadily rising in recent years, but also leveled off in 2004.

### Medicaid's Public Support

Most people think Medicaid is a "very important program" and should not be cut to balance state budgets, a poll of more than 1,200 adults conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation showed. In fact, the majority thought the federal government should maintain (44%) or increase (36%) federal spending on Medicaid, with only 12% favoring cuts. "We expected Medicaid to be relatively unpopular with the public, much like welfare was," said Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., Kaiser's director of public opinion and media research. The fact that many of the respondents (56%) reported having some interaction with Medicaid could explain why the program ranked closely with such other popular programs as Medicare and Social Security, she said.

### Kids Miss Smoking/Addiction Link

Nearly one-third of children aged 10-12 years believe that they can smoke without becoming addicted, according to a survey of 418 families by the Group Health Cooperative's Center for Health Studies, Seattle. Terry Bush, Ph.D., and colleagues surveyed the preteens on their attitudes and beliefs about smoking over a 20-month period and found that the percentage agreeing with the statement "peo-

ple can smoke a few cigarettes without becoming addicted" rose from 27% at the beginning of the study to 31% at the end. However, the percentage agreeing that "if you smoked, you could stop anytime you wanted to" dropped from 27% to 20% during that same period. The researchers found that two factors associated with positive attitudes toward smoking were lack of family cohesiveness and having a parent who smoked.

### Florida's Parental Notification Law

After a court battle and a state constitutional amendment, the requirement for parental notification when a minor seeks

an abortion is now the law in Florida. The "Parental Notice of Abortion Act" was signed by Gov. Jeb Bush (R). The legislation requires a physician to notify the parent or guardian of a minor at least 48 hours before the termination of a pregnancy. The law allows for the courts to waive the notification process in cases of medical emergency. The physician can also determine that a medical emergency exists, and there is insufficient time to comply with notification requirements; however, he or she must document the reason for the medical necessity in the patient's medical record.

—Jennifer Silverman with staff reports

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