

POLICY & PRACTICE

Illinois Enacts Stem Cell Law

Gov. Rod Blagojevich has signed a law permanently allowing state money to fund embryonic stem cell research in Illinois. The law permits embryonic stem cell researchers to receive state funds, while prohibiting cloning or any attempt to clone a human being. The legislation follows the governor's 2005 executive order establishing the Illinois Regenerative Medicine Institute program and allocating \$15 million for stem cell research grants, which were issued to researchers at several state hospitals and institutions. The new law authorizes

the Illinois Department of Public Health to administer the IRMI program to provide additional grants for stem cell research.

Breast-Feeding Ad Controversy Eyed

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is investigating allegations that former Surgeon General Richard Carmona was blocked from participating in a breast-feeding advocacy effort and that a federal campaign to promote breast-feeding was toned down after input from the formula industry. The investigation, part of the House panel's overall probe

into the independence of the surgeon general position, is examining events surrounding a Health and Human Services Department-sponsored advertising campaign promoting breast-feeding that ran 3 years ago. The ad campaign, which originally featured images of pregnant women taking risks in an effort to illustrate the health risks of formula feeding, was replaced with one featuring softer photographs after International Formula Council lawyers complained it was misleading.

Bill Seeks Physician Gift Disclosure

Legislation in the Senate would require quarterly disclosure of gifts, honoraria,

travel, and other payments to physicians by pharmaceutical, medical device, and biotechnology manufacturers. S. 2029 was introduced by Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.) and would apply to manufacturers with more than \$100 million in gross revenues. The U.S. Health and Human Services Department would be required to make the disclosure data available on the Internet. Penalties would range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 per violation. Ken Johnson, senior vice president of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, stated that his group had not yet reviewed the bill but that contact with physicians is essential for education purposes. The group's guidelines suggest gifts to physicians should not exceed \$100. The American Medical Association had also not yet read the proposal, but noted in testimony earlier this year that it has extensive guidelines on accepting anything from industry.

CMS Rejects Standards for Labs

Citing cost concerns, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has rejected a petition filed by a coalition of health and consumer groups calling for the agency to strengthen standards for genetic testing laboratories. The petition, filed jointly in September 2006 by the Genetics and Public Policy Center, Public Citizen, and the Genetic Alliance, sought to increase the use of proficiency testing by requesting the creation of a "specialty" for genetic testing. "The results of these tests are being used to make life-and-death decisions," said Genetic Alliance president Sharon Terry in a statement. "A patient who is going to decide whether to have a child, or undergo surgery, or take a particular drug, really needs to know that the test used to make that decision gives the right answer."

Senate Votes to Dump Global Gag Rule

The Senate has voted 52-46 to overturn the so-called global gag rule that bans family planning aid for international groups that use their own privately raised funds to counsel women on the availability of abortion, advocate for changes to abortion laws, or provide abortion services. Similar language overturning the ban already has been approved by the House as part of funding legislation. President Bush established the global gag rule by executive order on his first working day in office in 2001, and has threatened to veto legislation overturning it.

WHI Results Still Unclear to Many

Just 18% of physicians said they have "no confusion at all" about the results of the Women's Health Initiative study, according to an online survey of more than 400 physicians conducted on behalf of the Hormone Foundation. In addition, only 15% said they believe patients accurately understand the risks of hormone therapy. The results "underscore the importance of physicians' role in educating patients and [the public] on menopause management," said foundation director Paula Correa. The survey, sponsored by Novogyne Pharmaceuticals, also found that 74% of physicians still consider hormone therapy as a first-line treatment for menopause symptoms. Novogyne makes the hormone therapy patches Vivelle-Dot, Vivelle, and CombiPatch.

—Jane Anderson

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