

POLICY & PRACTICE

Now Playing: Vascular Neurology

The results are in: 225 neurologists have passed the first certification exam for the new subspecialty of vascular neurology. "The new subspecialty reflects the growth of cerebrovascular disease as an independent area of medical expertise," Harold P. Adams Jr., M.D., and colleagues said in announcing the test results in the October issue of *Stroke*. The authors note that the new certificates are valid for 10 years; to retain certification, physicians "will periodically have to complete an [American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology] maintenance of certification process, including taking another examination." The next scheduled certification examination will take place in June 2006. Meanwhile, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education has endorsed fellowship training in vascular neurology; after the 2009 examination, only those neurologists who have completed an ACGME-accredited program will be eligible for certification.

Neurology Council Gets New Members

Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt has appointed three new members to the National Advisory Neurological Disorders and Stroke Council, the major advisory panel of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. The new members, who will serve through July 2009, are Robi Blumenstein, president of MRSSI Inc., a company that provides consulting and grant-making services to foundations researching Huntington's disease; Helen Mayberg, M.D., professor of psychiatry and neurology at Emory University; and Laura Ment, M.D., professor of pediatrics and neurology at Yale University. Mr. Leavitt also announced that council member Patrick Pullicino, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chairman of neurosciences at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, will serve on the council for an additional year.

Anticonvulsant Education

The Epilepsy Foundation is telling women of childbearing age who take anticonvulsant medications to talk with their doctors about their treatment options. The group issued a "call to action" in an effort to make women aware of the risks to the fetus from these drugs. Since the risks from these drugs occur early in pregnancy and about half of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, it leaves women unprepared, according to the Epilepsy Foundation. The call to action "places a sense of urgency for all women of childbearing age to reevaluate their current drug treatment," Eric Hargis, president of the Epilepsy Foundation, said in a statement. This call to action is part of a larger effort to educate women about reducing the risks associated with anticonvulsant drugs, according to the group. More than 56 million prescriptions were written last year for anticonvulsants, making it the fifth most prescribed class of medications, according to the Epilepsy Foundation.

New Medicare Registries

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has announced that it is starting two new registries: one on carotid stents

and the other on fluorodeoxyglucose PET scans for dementia and neurodegenerative diseases. The carotid artery stent registry will "collect and maintain data on patients to review determinations of 'reasonable and necessary' with respect to ... patients who are at high risk for [carotid endarterectomy]," CMS said in a Sept. 20 Federal Register notice. As for the PET scans, the Oct. 13 Federal Register notice pointed out that although CMS has found sufficient evidence to deem PET scans no longer experimental, "the evidence was insufficient to reach a conclusion that FDG


PET is reasonable and necessary in all instances. A sufficient inference of benefit, however, can be drawn to support limited coverage if certain safeguards for patients are provided." Both regulations are available from www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html.

Voters Doubt Congress on Health

Roughly two-thirds of voters think Congress has not made much progress on helping those without health insurance, and is not likely to make much more in the next 5-10 years, according to a survey of 800 likely voters sponsored by Ceasefire on Health Care, a group whose aim is to

stimulate dialogue on health care between Republican and Democratic policy makers. Overall, poll respondents listed their top four health care priorities as making sure all U.S. children have access to basic health care, guaranteeing health care to every U.S. citizen, providing better preventive health care to all Americans, and helping control the amount of out-of-pocket health care costs. "Probably the most interesting result in this study is that 88% of those surveyed want Congress to compromise on the issue of the uninsured," said former Sen. John Breaux (D-La.), who is leading the group.

—Joyce Frieden



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Please see references and brief summary of prescribing information on adjacent page.

*IMS Dataview, July 2005.


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