POLICY BEAT
Weekly Digest
September 26th – September 30th, 2011

This Week in Health Policy...

• Individual Responsibility
• HHS Budget for 2012
• Physician Incomes
• Prescription Drug Abuse

Office of Health Policy and Government Relations
This week, the Department of Justice asked the U.S. Supreme Court to rule on whether or not the individual responsibility provision that underpins the Affordable Care Act is unconstitutional. The high court is likely to hear arguments in the 2011-12 session, with a ruling expected by next summer. More details are available here.
This week, the House Appropriations Committee released their budget plan for FY 2012. Funding for vital clinical and public health services could be in jeopardy. The work of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction could further complicate the appropriations process. The National Medical Association will keep members updated, as appropriate. More details available here.

**Highlights:**
Compared to FY 2011, the FY 2012 proposal will:

- Rescind the $1 billion Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF)
- Decrease health professions diversity training budget by $82 million
  - Decrease CDC budget by $52 million
- Increase community health centers’ budget by $1 billion
Primary care physicians and orthopedic surgeons in the US earned more per capita than their counterparts in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and the UK. In a study published by *Health Affairs*, researchers conclude that higher physician fees are “the main drivers” of higher US (health) spending. More details are available here.

**Highlights (annual income, pretax):**

**USA**: $186,582, primary care; $442,450 orthopedic surgery  
**France**: $95,585 primary care; $154,380 orthopedic surgery  
**Canada**: $125,04 primary care; $208,634 orthopedic surgery
Prescription drug abuse is “the nation’s fastest growing drug problem”, affecting all ages and demographics. Physicians are strongly encouraged to counsel their patients on how to avoid abusing their prescribed medications. More details on the national strategy to combat this epidemic are available here.

Image credit: Center for American Progress
• Please call your Members of Congress RIGHT NOW, and urge them to preserve Medicaid and Medicare funding. Contact info here.

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