POLICY BEAT

Weekly Digest
December 19th – December 23rd, 2011

This Week in Health Policy...

• EPA Unveils New Mercury Standards
• SGR Will Pay Doctors +1% in 2012?
• ICD-10 and Version 5010 Timelines
• Younger Nurses Joining Workforce

Office of Health Policy and Government Relations
Cleaner Air: EPA Unveils New Mercury Emission Standards

This week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) unveiled much-awaited national standards that will limit mercury emissions from power plants across the nation. Mercury and other toxic air pollutants are often unrecognized contributors to developmental, respiratory, and cardiovascular disease. More details are available here.

**Highlights:**

Every year, the new standards will prevent:

- **11,000 premature deaths**
- **4,700 heart attacks**
- **130,000 asthma attacks**
- **5,700 hospital and ER visits**

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Image credit: ThinkAboutIt
The U.S. House of Representatives has passed H.R. 3630, which, among other obligations, has provided for a 1% increase in Medicare reimbursements for doctors, rather than a 27% cut for calendar year 2012. The Senate has subsequently passed similar legislation, and the leadership in both chambers have decided to resolve their differences. The consequences of inaction would have been dire. More SGR details are available here.

Pictured above: House Speaker John Boehner. Photo credit: Alex Wong/Getty Images
ICD-10 and Version 5010: Compliance and Enforcement in 2012

Timelines for compliance with and enforcement of ICD-10 and Version 5010 standards remain unclear to some, and onerous to many. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is executing a massive stakeholder awareness campaign to ensure that providers and payers alike are ready for the transition in 2013. More details, including a helpful timeline, are available here. For the most up-to-date news, including CMS’ recent notice about enforcement discretion, and to sign up for email updates, click here.

Key date – Jan 1, 2012: after this date, Medicare will no longer be accept version 4010 for electronic transactions. Only version 5010 will be accepted.
More Registered Nurses: Supply Grows Among 23-26 Cohort

The graph below describes the supply of registered nurses aged 23-26 in the American workforce. Published in this month’s issue of Health Affairs, this research study evaluated employment data from 1973 to 2009. The trends show a decrease in full time equivalents (FTEs) from 1973 to 1990 (y axis). An overall increase in FTEs in that age group was observed in recent years, especially since 2002. Researchers conclude that the nursing workforce will grow at roughly the same rate as the general population through 2030. More detail available here.

Image Credit: Health Affairs
What You Can Do

• Please call your Members of Congress, and urge them to preserve optimal funding for Medicare reimbursements to doctors. Contact info here.

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