This Week in Health Policy…

- President Signs Law to Reverse Medicare Cuts
- Coming July 1st – Healthcare.gov
- Patient’s Bill of Rights
- Health Effects of the BP Oil Spill
- Implementation Issues: Medicaid Expansion
President Signs Law to Reverse Medicare Payment Cuts

On June 25th, President Obama signed H.R. 3962, the “Preservation of Access to Care for Medicare Beneficiaries and Pension Relief Act of 2010,” into law, reversing the 21 percent Medicare physician payment cuts which took effect on June 1st.

The legislation provides a 2.2 percent raise for physician reimbursements, from June 1 through November 30, 2010. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will begin to retroactively adjust any June claims that have been paid.

While the 6 month reprieve from payment cuts is welcome news, it does not address the deeper problems with the sustainable growth rate (SGR) payment formula – that it is inherently flawed. The NMA continues to support a permanent solution to fix the broken Medicare physician payment system and to ensure access to care for elderly and disabled patients.
On July 1st, the Department of Health and Human Services is launching HealthCare.gov, as mandated by recently enacted health reform law. This innovative web portal is designed to provide consumers with a central location to compare health insurance plans.

Initially, www.healthcare.gov will provide basic information on the private insurers and public insurance programs for individuals and small businesses in their areas. Beginning in October, it will list premiums and benefits information.

Portal functionality:
- easy to navigate and free of insurance industry jargon;
- allows user to compare health insurance plans;
- allows user to sort the data based on their own situations.
President Barack Obama on Tuesday marked the 90-day anniversary of the passage of the health reform law by unveiling the *Patient’s Bill of Rights*. The Bill of Rights is a summary of new regulations issued by the Department of Health and Human Services that will apply to nearly all health insurance plans starting September 23rd.

The Patient’s Bill of Rights details five consumer protections:

- No preexisting condition exclusions;
- No lifetime health insurance coverage limits;
- Restricted annual dollar limits on coverage;
- No arbitrary rescissions of insurance coverage; and
- Guaranteed direct access to certain types of providers and access to out-of-network emergency care.

• Click [here](#) to read, "Fact Sheet: The Affordable Care Act’s New Patient’s Bill of Rights.

• Click [here](#) to watch video of President Obama announcing these regulations at a White House ceremony.
Two congressional committees held hearings last week to identify and address the potential health effects of the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Click here to read the briefing memo from the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee. Click here to view video of the Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions full committee hearing. Read the following testimonies from the hearings:

- **Dr. Lisa Kaplowitz**, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, HHS
- **Dr. John Howard**, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, CDC
- **Dr. Aubrey Miller**, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, NIH, HHS
- **Mike Taylor**, Food and Drug Administration

For additional information on the federal government’s efforts to support the health and medical needs of residents and responders impacted by the oil spill, read the HHS factsheet.
Implementing Health Reform: Medicaid Expansion

A paper published in the June issue of *Health Affairs*, examines a number of the key issues inherent in the planning and implementation of Medicaid expansion, as prescribed by the recently enacted health reform law. This week, Connecticut became the first state in the nation to permanently add low-income adults to its Medicaid program. Other states vary, however, in their level of readiness to execute the expansion of Medicaid.

The article entitled, *Ready, Set, Plan, Implement: Executing The Expansion Of Medicaid*, by Leighton Ku, raises the following questions and offers answers to the challenges facing federal and state governments in expanding Medicaid:

- How will states establish enrollment and coordination procedures?
- Will there be enough health care providers to care for the newly insured?
- What will Medicaid expansion cost states?
What You Can Do

Register to attend the 2010 National Medical Association Annual Convention & Scientific Assembly in Orlando, Florida, July 31 – August 4, 2010. Make plans to arrive in Orlando by the morning of July 31st in order to attend this year’s Mazique Symposium.

For the latest health policy news and information, visit our page NMA Health Policy Updates.

Continue to visit our Haiti Earthquake Relief page for information on relief efforts.


