POLICY & PRACTICE

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Endocrinologists Must Educate

Endocrinologists have a responsibility to educate other health professionals on the most up-to-date treatments and guidelines in the field, even when those sessions are sponsored by industry, the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists said in a statement. "Educational presentations provide the scientific background, the data, and the reasoning to understand new treatment options and make better use of old ones," said the statement from the board of directors. "To make this education accessible it must take place in as many settings as possible, and when sponsored by industry it operates under very strict rules of conduct." Educators take time away from their practices to prepare for and present the programs, the board noted, adding that "the legitimate concerns surrounding the abuses of a limited number of physicians should not undermine a fundamental tenet in the practice of medicine – the commitment to the lifelong study and furthering of medical knowledge required to continuously improve patient care."

Endocrinologists Top Payment List

Eleven of the 43 physicians who earned more than $200,000 each from seven large pharmaceutical companies hold board certification in endocrinology – more than in any other specialty – according to an analysis by the journalism advocacy group ProPublica. Endocrinology is a "hotly competitive area because of the multibillion dollar market for diabetes drugs," ProPublica said. The list's overall top earner, endocrinologist Firhaad Ismail of Las Vegas, earned $303,558 in 2009 from drug makers. Another endocrinologist, Dr. Samuel Dagogo-Jack of Memphis, occupies the No. 3 position on the list with a $257,012 income from the companies. Only 3 of the top 43 earners are women, and all of them are endocrinologists, ProPublica said. Seven drug manufacturers have published payments to individual physicians on their Web sites, and the new list reflects those data.

Educator MS Program Launched

Teachers College, Columbia University's graduate school of education, will launch the nation's first master's degree program for diabetes educators in the fall of 2011. The online program, based in the college's department of health and behavior studies, is intended to equip clinicians and care managers with greater research-based understanding of how diabetes develops and affects different populations, the school said. The program will train diabetes educators to help patients manage treatment and help caregivers secure Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements for such training. It also will address multicultural issues in diabetes. The interdisciplinary 36-credit program will lead to a master of science degree. Twenty-five students are expected to enroll in its inaugural class.

$1.6 Million Will Fight Disparities

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has awarded four health care organizations a total of $1.6 million to test programs aimed at eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities in diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and depression care. The University of Illinois at Chicago, insurer WellPoint Inc., Sutter Health in San Francisco, and Lancaster General Health in Pennsylvania each will receive up to $400,000 to evaluate the impact of chronic disease programs designed to close racial and ethnic care gaps. The grantees will test interventions against the diseases in at least three community settings to find differences in effect between various settings and patient groups, according to the foundation.

Hospital Adverse Events Common

More than 13% of Medicare beneficiaries hospitalized in late 2008 had at least one adverse event causing lasting harm during their stays. Among them, 1.5% experienced an event that contributed to their deaths, according to a report from the Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General. Another 13% of hospitalized beneficiaries experienced temporary harm, such as hypoglycemia, the report found. The combination of events cost Medicare an estimated $324 million in October 2008, the month the report covered, which means that such events could cost $4.4 billion a year. Physicians reviewing the data said 44% of the adverse events were preventable.

–Jane Anderson