POLICY & PRACTICE

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Fight Fat, Clinicians Urged

To curb childhood obesity, health care providers should monitor weight and height as part of every well-child visit, and should teach parents how to increase their children's' physical activity and decrease sedentary behavior, according to a report from the Institute of Medicine. The report also urges pediatricians to encourage breastfeeding and provide guidance on healthy eating strategies for children. In addition, health care providers should counsel parents on limiting television and other media use, including banning televisions and other media devices from young children's bedrooms. The IOM report also details steps that policy makers and federal programs can take to curb early childhood obesity.

Doctors Sue Over Gun Law

The Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has sued Florida Gov. Rick Scott (R) and other state officials in federal court to overturn the new state law that restricts physicians from talking to their patients about gun ownership. The lawsuit, which includes two other physician groups and several individual physicians, says the law violates the First Amendment right to free speech. A health care provider could lose a license to practice and be fined for discussing firearm safety or putting an entry about it a patient's health record. A medical board would have to determine that the information was irrelevant or "unnecessarily harassing." Florida Pediatric Society President Lisa Cosgrove said in a statement that pediatricians have the responsibility to discuss with patients the "scientifically proven risks to children posed by guns in the home." With eight children and teens killed by guns every day in the United States, "restricting the ability of pediatricians to fully discuss the significant risks posed by guns is dangerous and a violation of the standard of care we as physicians owe our patients," she said.

Children's Weight Is Unchecked

About 58% of pediatricians and family physicians fail to track children's weight over time and to provide counseling on weight-related issues when appropriate, according to a survey conducted by federal researchers. Only 18% of physicians caring for children reported referring overweight or obese patients for further evaluation and management. Pediatricians were slightly more likely than family physicians to assess weight status and to provide related counseling, according to the study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine and conducted by scientists at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Brain Testing Offered Free

The Scottsdale, Ariz.–based Mayo Clinic says it will offer free baseline concussion testing to more than 100,000 high school student athletes statewide. The Computerized Cognitive Assessment Tool, which measures how the brain is working before injury, can be taken over the Internet. Following a concussion, the patient can take the test again – several times, if necessary – to help a physician determine when the student-athlete can return to play safely, according to the Mayo Clinic. A new Arizona state law bars injured high school athletes from play until cleared by a licensed health care provider. The law also requires schools to educate coaches, students, and parents about the dangers of concussions.

Pediatricians' Income Grew Little

Pediatricians and adolescent medicine specialists earned a median income of $192,148 in 2010, an increase of just 0.39% from 2009, according to the Medical Group Management Association's annual survey on physician compensation. During the 4 years from 2006 to 2010, the child-and-adolescent doctors gained slightly more than 10.3% in income, the survey found. However, with the figures adjusted for inflation, the doctors gained only 1.97% for 2006-2010 and lost 1.23% for 2009-2010, the group found. Although pediatrics was the only primary care specialty to lose inflation-adjusted income last year, family practice and general internal medicine physicians failed to gain much ground, seeing growth of only 1.28% and 2.53% last year, respectively.

–Jane Anderson