



POLICY & PRACTICE

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Barriers to Care in New Orleans

Four years after Hurricane Katrina, children in New Orleans are still at risk for mental health problems and yet continue encountering barriers to care, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office. The GAO estimated that 187,000 children were living in the four parishes that make up the

metro area, and that a "substantial number of these children may need referrals for mental health services." Lack of providers and lack of funding continuity were cited as barriers to providing services, along with transportation problems, competing family priorities, and concerns about stigma. Federal grants have helped, but aren't enough, the re-

port said. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-Conn.) and Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) requested the study.

Obesity Concern Is Rising

Public concern about childhood obesity in the United States, already high, continues to increase, according to a poll conducted by the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The National Poll on Children's Health found that the proportion of adults who believe childhood obesity is a big problem has increased from 35% in 2008 to 42% in 2009. Blacks and Hispanics now rate

childhood obesity as their biggest childhood health concern. Before, blacks' chief concern for children was teen pregnancy and Hispanics' was smoking, according to the study. Drug abuse was ranked second overall in the poll: 36% of adults rated drug abuse as a big problem for children. Smoking, which had been ranked No. 1 in 2007, now holds the No. 3 position, with 32% of adults saying it's a big problem. Bullying, Internet safety, and child abuse and neglect rounded out the top six concerns.

Lunch Eats Up School Budgets

Most school food-service directors say that rising expenses and limited funding are the most pressing issues facing school cafeteria programs nationwide, according to a poll from the School Nutrition Association. Nearly 60% of districts increased school lunch prices this year to keep up with the costs, the survey found. The median increase, 25 cents, was significantly larger than the 15-cent median increase reported in 2007, the last time the survey was conducted. Also, at every grade level, more children were participating in free and reduced-price meal programs. On the plus side, school nutrition programs increasingly are offering healthy options, with peak gains seen in vegetarian offerings and low-fat prepared and packaged foods. In addition, locally grown fruits and vegetables were available on more than one-third of school menus, and an additional 21% of districts were considering such offerings.

Hyponatremia Danger in Children

Spurred by the deaths of two children from hyponatremia after surgery, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices has

Continued on following page

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1. Williams T, Choe Y, Price P, et al. *Microb Ecol* 2009;57(3):584.
2. Data on file 2009, Abbott Nutrition, Columbus, Ohio.
3. Ben XM, Zhou XY, et al. *Chin Med J (Engl)* 2004;117(16):927-931.
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warned health care practitioners to become better educated about the causes, signs, and symptoms of the condition. The institute cautioned that postoperative children are at high risk for developing hyponatremia, which is the most common electrolyte disorder among hospitalized patients. It can be caused by administration of intravenous fluids containing too little sodium and, if untreated, can result in severe brain swelling and death. The institute said that one of the children who died had undergone an outpatient tonsillectomy, while the other had had vascular

surgery. The organization recommended that standards of practice be established for intravenous hydration of patients, particularly children. Protocols should establish how to identify and treat patients with hyponatremia and related conditions, and all physicians, nurses, and pharmacists should gain a thorough understanding of the condition in children, the group said.

Youth Tobacco Sales Drop More

Sales of tobacco to children have reached historic lows, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration said. SAMHSA credited the Synar Amendment program, which requires states to

prohibit the sale and distribution of tobacco to people under age 18. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have, for the third year running, achieved better than 80% compliance among tobacco product retailers, SAMHSA said. "Continued state vigilance will build on our track record of success in protecting children from the public health menace of tobacco," said SAMHSA acting administrator Eric Broderick, D.D.S., in a statement.

Congress Weighs 'Safe Babies Act'

A bipartisan group led by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) has introduced legislation known as the Safe Babies Act of 2009 in the Senate (S. 1554) that would create


local court teams to protect maltreated children, screen them for developmental and health issues, and counsel parents. Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro (D-Conn.) introduced a companion bill in the House (H.R. 3474). The teams would be led by a judge with jurisdiction over children in foster care and would include pediatricians and other child welfare professionals. These groups would review cases monthly and guide medical, developmental, mental health, and substance abuse interventions for maltreated children and their families. Five cosponsors joined Sen. Harkin in the Senate, and three joined Rep. DeLauro in the House.

—Jane Anderson

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