

# POLICY & PRACTICE

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#### **Malpractice Payments Are Down**

Medical malpractice payments were at record low levels in 2008, according to an analysis by the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen. In 2008, for the third straight year, the number of malpractice payments reached a new low since the federal government's National Practitioner Data Bank began tracking such data in 1990, the group said. The data showed that 11,037 payments were made last year, which Public Citizen said was nearly one-third lower than the historical average. The monetary value of payments was either the lowest or second lowest since 1990, depending on how inflation was calculated, the group said. The total cost of all malpractice insurance premiums fell to much less than 1% of the total \$2.1 trillion in annual health costs in 2006 (the most recent year for which full data were available). The cost of actual malpractice payments to patients fell to 0.2% of overall health costs, the group said. David Arkush, director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch division, said in a statement that the numbers indicate that many victims of medical malpractice receive no compensation for their injuries.

### **OIG Sheds Light on Ultrasound Claims**

Auditors in the Health and Human Services Department have urged Medicare officials to begin flagging "questionable" ultrasound claims and investigating providers who submit large numbers of them. The HHS office of inspector general estimated that 3.2 million ultrasound claims, about 1 in 5 nationwide, have at least one characteristic that is questionable. The most common of these is the lack of a service claim by the ordering physician. The report said that a group of 672 providers each billed 500 or more claims with questionable characteristics in 2007. Collectively, they billed more than \$81 million in Part B ultrasound charges. The full report is available at www.oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/ oei-01-08-00100.pdf.

#### **HIV Exclusion Would End**

Under a new proposal by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States would no longer bar immigrants with HIV. Starting in 1987, the infectionlike AIDS—was listed as a communicable disease of public health significance, making infected people ineligible to receive U.S. visas. Last year, Congress removed AIDS from the list but left HIV infection to the discretion of the CDC. The proposed rule would officially remove HIV from the communicable disease list. "While HIV is a serious health condition, it does not represent a communicable disease that is a significant threat for introduction, transmission, and spread to the U.S. population through casual contact," the CDC wrote in the proposed rule.

## **Violence Against Women Is Focus**

The Obama administration named the

first-ever White House adviser on violence against women. Lynn Rosenthal, a national expert on domestic violence policy, will advise the president and vice president and will work with federal agencies on their domestic violence and sexual assault prevention programs. In the newly created role, she also will consult advocacy groups and members

of Congress to develop new policies. Ms. Rosenthal served most recently as the executive director of the New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The White House announcement said she was a major advocate for reauthorizations of the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 and 2005 and helped states and communities implement the legislation. The announcement, from the vice president, said that Ms. Rosenthal's areas of expertise include housing, state and community responses to domestic violence, and survivor advocacy.

### **Many Young Adults Uninsured**

Approximately 5 million adults aged 19-23 years in the United States had no health insurance in 2006 for the entire year, and 30% of them said they didn't think it was worth the cost, according to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Ouality.

The AHRQ found that 46% of uninsured young adults worked full time and 26% worked part time. Only 19% of those who were uninsured throughout 2006 were full-time students, the agency

-Mary Ellen Schneider

#### **YAZ®**

(drospirenone and ethinyl estradiol) Tablets

Brief Summary of Prescribing Information
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spice compactions. Shown hypotension. Fishers with social anniholations of which compact dispositions of the control and the social and the control and the co

The SAMPLE To record in countries of an individual of the country users. 10. HEADACHE: The onset or exacerbation of migraine or development of headache with a new pattern which is recurrent, persistent or severe requires discontinuation of oral contraceptives and evaluation of the cause. 11. BLEEDING IRREGULARTHES: Breakthrough bleeding, and spotting are sometimes encountered in patients on oral contraceptives, sepecially during the first three months of use. Nonhormonal causes should be considered and adequate diagnostic measures belien to rule undiliginary or preparancy in the event of breakthrough beleding, as in the scae of any abnormal vaginal bleeding, lapathology has been excluded, time or a change to another formulation may solve the problem. In the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the contraction of the problem. The problem is the very contractive that are the problem in the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the problem. The problem is the very contractive that are the problem in the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenornhae, pregnancy should be ruled to the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenornhae problem is the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenor the problem in the event of amenors are the problem. The problem is the problem in the event of amenors are the problem in the event of the problem in the event of amenors are the problem in the event of the problem in the ev



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