POLICY & PRACTICE

Virginia Children Wait for Medicaid

More than half of Virginia children whose parents applied for Medicaid coverage waited for 4-6 months for their applications to be processed—and 90% went without coverage during that time—as a result of a new federal law requiring proof of citizenship to receive benefits, according to a state survey. The survey of 800 families, conducted by the Virginia Health Care Foundation in partnership with the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, found that the new requirements resulted in a significant decrease in the number of children enrolled in Medicaid in the state, in an inability of citizen children to obtain medical care, and in a dramatic increase in emergency department utilization by those caught up in lengthy eligibility determinations.

Report Disputes SCHIP Numbers

An Urban Institute analysis of uninsured children eligible for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) indicates that far fewer children than previously thought may be eligible for SCHIP. The new study focuses on children who were uninsured for an entire year, unlike other studies that have looked at children who were uninsured for just part of a year. The Health and Human Services Department, which released the new Urban Institute study, said the lower estimate shows that adding $50 billion in additional funding to the SCHIP program is unnecessary. But Democratic senators, who are slated to consider SCHIP reauthorization legislation soon, dismissed the report.

MDs Should Use the Term 'Obese'

Physicians should use blunt, clinical terms such as "overweight" and "obese" to describe conditions currently called "at risk for overweight" and "overweight," a panel of health experts representing 15 major medical associations said in a report. In recommending the changes, the panel members said that the terms used now allow physicians to avoid counseling patients in need of intervention. The panel also recommended that physicians assess children's weight and body mass index at least once a year and evaluate nutrition and activity habits for all pediatric patients during regular checkups. The panel was convened by the American Medical Association, with funding from federal agencies, and the voluntary guidelines have been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Improved Ped Paxil Settlement

Public Citizen said it has won greater compensation for parents of children who took the antidepressant Paxil but can't provide documentation of their purchase or related costs. In an earlier complaint (*Hoormann et al. v. SmithKline Beecham Corp.*), the defendants alleged the company misled parents by not disclosing that the drug was dangerous and ineffective for children younger than age 18 years. Paxil maker GlaxoSmithKline Inc. was required to put $63.8 million into a fund to pay class members' out-of-pocket expenses and attorneys' fees, but members who could not provide proof of expenses were limited to a $15 payout and a pro rata share of $300,000, depending on the number of claimants. In a revised settlement approved by the Third Judicial Circuit of Madison County, Ill., claimants without documentation will now get up to $100, and the $300,000 pro rata cap is eliminated, according to the organization Public Citizen. Information on the settlement is at www.paxilpediatricsettlement.com.

Hawaii to Offer Kids Free Flu Shots

This fall, Hawaii will become the first state to offer free influenza vaccinations to school children aged 5-13 years. The shots will be available October 2007-January 2008 at school during the school day. Funding for the estimated $2.5 million program is being provided primarily by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the State of Hawaii, with additional support from the state's largest insurer, the Hawaii Medical Service Association. Nationally, school children have very high rates of influenza illness, exceeding 10% in most years, according to the Hawaii State Department of Health.

AAOS Warns About Wheeled Shoes

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) has warned that children who wear roller shoes or street gliders—shoes with wheels in the heel—should wear protective gear such as wrist guards and helmets to avoid injuries. According to AAOS President James Beaty, a pediatric orthopaedic surgeon, physicians are seeing children come into their practices with injuries—mostly fractures within the hand, wrist, or elbow—that are attributable to these shoes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission said the agency received reports of one death and at least 64 injuries related to wheeled sneakers between September 2005 and December 2006.

—Jane Anderson