

POLICY & PRACTICE

LBW Births in U.S. Rise Slightly

More infants continue to be born at low birth weight, according to findings from the federal government's annual statistical report on the well-being of American children. The report, from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, showed a small uptick in the percentage of infants born at low birth rate, from 8.2% in 2005 to 8.3% in 2006. Just 7% of infants were born at low birth weight in 1990. "This trend reflects an increase in the number of infants born prematurely, the largest category of low-birth-weight infants," Dr. Duane Alexander, director of NIH's National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, said in a statement. Other possible factors include an increase in multiple births, delayed childbearing, and infertility therapies, according to the NIH.

Court Upholds Abortion Consent Clause

A South Dakota law that expands the requirements for informed consent prior to an abortion recently went into effect following a federal appeals court ruling. The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals voted 7-4 to overturn a lower court's injunction and allow the law to go into effect. The law requires that the patient be given a written statement prior to abortion that the procedure will terminate the "life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being." The South Dakota legislature originally passed the law in 2005 but it has been tied up in the courts after being challenged by Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The lawsuit challenged the law on constitutional grounds saying that it would violate the rights of physicians and patients by interfering with the doctor-patient relationship.

Planned Parenthood Endorses Obama

The Planned Parenthood Action Fund, the political arm of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, recently endorsed Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) for president. The group praised Sen. Obama as a "passionate advocate for women's rights." The candidate has a 100% rating from the group both as a U.S. senator and as a state senator in Illinois. Sen. Obama is a cosponsor of the Freedom of Choice Act (H.R. 1964/S. 1173), which would codify abortion rights. He supports comprehensive sex education, expanding access to contraceptives, and expanding family planning efforts worldwide, according to Planned Parenthood. The group criticized Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), saying that he has a 0% rating with the organization and that he wants to overturn Roe v. Wade.

CMS Issues \$36M in PQRI Bonuses

Physicians who successfully reported quality measures to Medicare in 2007 as part of the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative should be receiving their bonus payments this month. Officials at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently announced that they had paid out more than \$36 million in bonuses to physicians and other health professionals as part of PQRI. Of the approximately 109,000 health professionals who reported data on Medicare services provided during July-December 2007, more than 56,700 met the re-

porting requirements and will be receiving bonus checks. The average bonus paid to an individual provider was more than \$600, and the average bonus for a physician group practice was more than \$4,700. "These payments to physicians for participating in the PQRI are a first step toward improving how Medicare pays for health care services," Kerry Weems, acting administrator, said in a statement. Under PQRI, physicians could earn bonus payments of up to 1.5% of their total allowed Medicare charges by successfully reporting quality data for Medicare services provid-

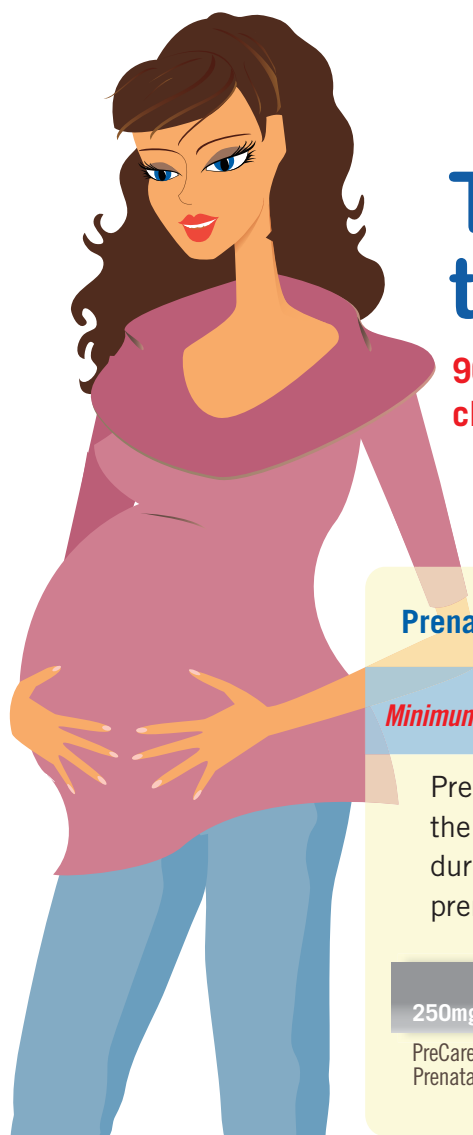
ed from July to December 2007. In addition to the bonus payments, physicians and other health professionals can also start accessing confidential feedback reports on their performance. To access the feedback reports, providers must register with the Individuals Authorized Access to CMS Computer Services-Provider Community. More information on the program is available at www.cms.hhs.gov/PQRI.

NIH Seeks to Cut Science Gender Gap

NIH officials plan to spend up to \$3 million in an effort to advance the careers of women in biomedical and behavioral science and engineering. The agency plans to

award eight grants in fiscal year 2009 for research that can better explain the career patterns of women in the science and engineering fields and test programs designed to encourage women to enter these areas. Researchers will be tasked with looking at family and economic circumstances, institutional environments, disciplinary culture and practices, and the broader social and cultural context. "Through rigorous research efforts, the NIH and others will continue to close the gender gap in science and engineering," Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, NIH director, said in a statement.

—Mary Ellen Schneider



#1 OB/GYN recommended calcium supplement for pregnant patients

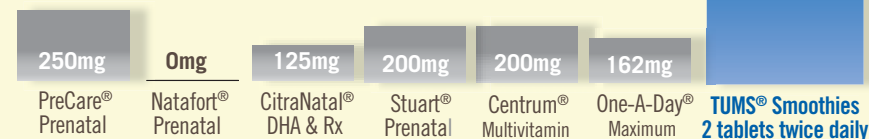
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References: 1. Calcium Recommendations. Available at: http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/nationaldairycouncil/nutrition/nutrients/calcium_recommendations.pdf. 2. Institute of Medicine. DRI: Dietary Reference Intake for Calcium, Phosphorus, Magnesium, Vitamin D and Fluoride. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1997. 3. PreCare Prenatal product labeling. 4. Natafort Prenatal product labeling. 5. CitraNatal RX product labeling. 6. Stuart Prenatal product labeling. 7. Centrum Multivitamin product labeling. 8. One-A-Day Multivitamin product labeling. 9. Hofmeyr, GJ, Atallah, Duley L. Calcium supplementation during pregnancy for preventing hypertensive disorders and related problems. The Cochrane Library 2006 Syst. Rev. 2008;3:CD001059. PreCare is a registered trademark of KV Pharmaceutical Company. Natafort is a registered trademark of Warner Chilcott, PLC. CitraNatal is a registered trademark of Mission Pharmaceutical Company. Stuart is a registered trademark of Integrity Pharmaceutical Corporation. Centrum is a registered trademark of Wyeth Consumer Healthcare. One-A-Day is a registered trademark of Bayer Consumer Healthcare. Read and follow label directions. ©2008 GlaxoSmithKline GSK8-029