

POLICY & PRACTICE

Drug Use During Pregnancy

A report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration says that 4.3% of pregnant women aged 15-44 years used an illicit drug in the past month, compared with 10.4% of non-pregnant women in this age group. SAMHSA extracted data from the 2002 and 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health to show that among pregnant women in this age group, 9.8% also reported drinking alcohol in the past month, and 4.1% reported binge alcohol use of five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least one

day in the past month. The report is available online at www.oas.samhsa.gov.

Florida's Parental Notification Law

After a court battle and a constitutional amendment, the requirement for parental notification when a minor seeks an abortion is now the law in Florida. The "Parental Notice of Abortion Act," which was signed by Gov. Jeb Bush (R) in May, became effective July 1. The legislation requires a physician to notify the parent or guardian of a minor at least 48 hours before the termination of a pregnancy. The

law allows for the courts to waive the notification process in cases of medical emergency. The physician can also determine that a medical emergency exists, and there is insufficient time to comply with notification requirements; however, he or she must document the reason for the medical necessity in the patient's medical record. The Florida legislature had previously enacted a parental notification bill, but it was struck down by the courts as unconstitutional. Supporters of the law reintroduced legislation this year after voters passed a constitutional amendment in November 2004 that would allow such legislation to become law.

Illinois Malpractice Bill

Another state has taken steps to curb rising malpractice costs. In May, the Illinois General Assembly approved legislation to place caps of \$500,000 per physician and \$1 million per hospital for noneconomic damages. The legislation also calls for increased physician scrutiny by posting disciplinary actions and malpractice lawsuit outcomes on the Internet, and requires insurers to release actuarial data during public hearings called to review rate increases. Steve Schneider, vice president of the American Insurance Association, Midwest Region, took issue with this last provision, indicating it would "send the wrong message to insurers who may be considering entering the market." At press time, Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) was expected to sign the bill into law.

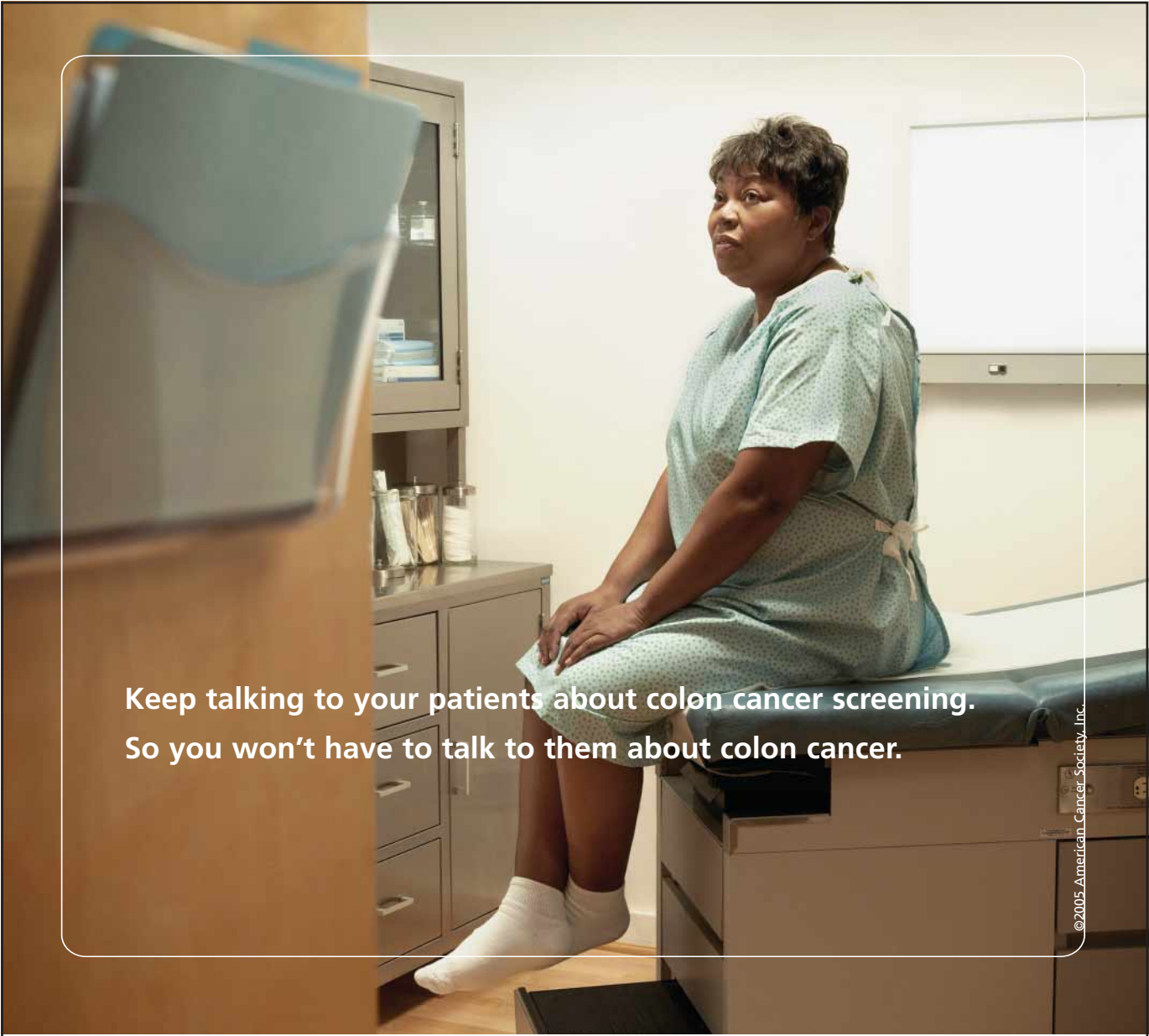
Cloning Policy

The science of human cloning is moving faster than the public's understanding of it and government's ability to enact policy about it, according to a study from the Genetics and Public Policy Center. "Scientists have cloned cows, cats, and human embryos. Meanwhile, the public and policy makers have reached a political impasse—we're embroiled in a complex and divisive ethical and policy debate that too often is rushed and emotionally charged," Kathy Hudson, Ph.D., director of center, said in a statement. For example, there is still no federal policy on human cloning, even though a number of bills have been introduced in Congress since 1997. Currently, five states ban all forms of cloning, and four have banned reproductive cloning but allow the technology to be used for research or therapeutic purposes. Three states restrict the use of state funds for research or therapeutic cloning. Conversely, California is using state funds to promote stem-cell research. And public opinion varies often depending on what terms are used and the context of the questions, the report said. The Genetics and Public Policy Center is a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. The report is available online at www.dnapolicy.org.

The Chosen Profession

"Be a physician" is the most common career advice that Americans give young adults, according to a Gallup poll of 1,003 adults aged 18 years and older. Of those who responded to the survey, 20% recommended that young women become doctors, while 17% suggested medicine as a career for young men. By comparison, only 11% and 8% suggested that women and men choose careers in computers, respectively. Nursing continues to be viewed as a women's profession: 13% thought women should choose nursing, whereas that choice did not even make the top five careers for men. Medicine has always been cited as a top career choice for men, although the percentages have been rising steadily over the years for women, as more pursue careers as physicians. "These poll results offer great encouragement for a profession facing a diversity gap and a workforce deficit," said Jordan J. Cohen, M.D., president of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

—Mary Ellen Schneider



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*Source: <http://prg.nci.nih.gov/colorectal/>

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