HHS Committee Calls for Medical Home Funding

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Support for the concept of the patient-centered medical home continues to grow, with the latest nod coming from the federal Advisory Committee on Training in Primary Care Medicine and Dentistry.

The committee, which provides policy advice to Congress and the Health and Human Services secretary, is finalizing a report that recommends that policy makers invest in training physicians on how to operate within the medical home model and evaluate the health outcomes associated with this model of care.

A failure to invest in the medical home model now will impair efforts to improve quality and control costs, the committee wrote. The United States "faces a watershed moment when it can restructure health care to focus on prevention and coordinated, comprehensive care through the adoption of this promising new model of care," the committee wrote in the draft report.

The report, which is expected to be released in its final form in late 2008, calls for changes to Title VII, Section 747 of the Public Health Service Act. For example, the committee is recommending that the HHS secretary expand the authority of that law to include directing continuing medical education programs to train currently practicing physicians in aspects of the medical home, including interdisciplinary team-based care, care of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, and the use of information technology.

It also calls on the HHS secretary to promote dissemination of the best practices related to providing a medical home that have been identified by researchers.

Other draft recommendations from the committee include the following:

- Funding pilot programs that contribute to the development and evaluation of the medical home, with priority given to those programs that address the needs of underserved populations.
- Developing measures to evaluate the medical home in terms of accessibility and patient satisfaction, health status, quality of care, health disparities, and cost.
- Implementing key components of the medical home model in academic medical centers, in an effort to prepare faculty educators.

The committee's next report, due out in May 2009, will explore how primary care training would need to be redesigned to further the concept of the medical home. It will also address the difficulties in hand-offs between pediatric and adult medicine specialists when patients with chronic illnesses reach adulthood, as well as on workforce issues and medical school debt. ■

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published 5 years after the drug in question was approved. Among all the trials, those with statistically significant results were nearly twice as likely to have been published as those without statistically significant results, and pivotal trials were three times more likely to have been published as nonpivotal trials. But the study revealed "selective reporting" of results, the authors said. "A pivotal trial in which the new drug does no better than an old drug is less likely to be published than one where the new drug is more effective, a publication bias that could establish an inappropriately favorable record for the new drug in the medical literature," the authors wrote.

Florida Files Vioxx Suit

Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum has sued Merck & Co. on behalf of state agencies he said were damaged by "the company's allegedly deceptive marketing and promotion" of Vioxx. The lawsuit follows a 3-year investigation of Merck's promotional practices of Vioxx (rofecoxib) and alleges that, due to the company's marketing practices, numerous Florida agencies approved the inclusion of Vioxx as a covered or approved drug. Vioxx purchases by the Florida Medicaid program exceeded $80 million between 1999 and 2004, according to Mr. McCollum, who argued that, if the facts about Vioxx had been known earlier, physicians and their Medicaid patients would have chosen other, less expensive prescriptions. Eight other states have filed similar lawsuits, according to Merck spokesman Ronald Rogers, who said in an interview that Merck acted responsibly on Vioxx and will defend against the suits.

—Jane Anderson