Medscape Releases Provider Module on the Health Insurance Marketplace

The Health Insurance Marketplace will officially open on October 1, 2013. To inform healthcare providers about the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) insurance requirements, Medscape editors conducted an interview with Mandy Cohen, MD, MPH, Senior Advisor to the Administrator at the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In this online exchange, Dr. Cohen explains the fundamental aspects of the Marketplace as providers prepare to educate and answer patient questions.

Questions cover content related to the individual requirements, small business options, the tax credit, and what patients need to know. The interview also investigates if there will be any changes to how providers interact with current health plans, what plans are in place to ensure there are enough providers, and what does the Marketplace mean for providers whose practices are a small business. For those who complete the module, 0.5 continuing education credit hours will be awarded. Interested individuals may access the module via Medscape at https://login.medscape.com/login/sso/getlogin?urlCache=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5tZWRzY2FwZS5vcmcvdmllcmlld2FydGlj
bGUvNzgyNzc2P3NyYz1jbXNhY2E=&ac=401.

IOM Discussion Paper Explores ACA Impact on the Underserved

Amplifying the Voice of the Underserved in the Implementation of the Affordable Care Act, a new discussion paper published by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), investigates the unique challenges that will be faced by underserved communities as the law’s insurance provisions take effect. The paper offers recommendations around two central ideas: strengthening the patient voice and communicating in ways that will be meaningful to underserved communities. Several of the recommendations focus on the most effective way to educate underserved populations on the opportunities available through the ACA. These include using community-created messages with information, not only on how to obtain healthcare insurance under the ACA, but also how to use it responsibly; ensuring organizations conducting community outreach are well-trained and have the necessary resources; and incorporating a focus on limited-English-speaking communities in the creation of outreach materials. The final recommendation proposes to evaluate the performance of state and federal efforts through measuring the level of confidence among new customers.

To read the report coauthored by Kavita Patel, MD, MS, Ruth Parker, MD, Antonia M. Villarruel, PhD, RN, FAAN, and Winston Wong, MD, MS, see: http://www.iom.edu/Global/Perspectives/2013/AmplifyingTheVoice. Please note this is a discussion paper, not a formal report endorsed by the Institute of Medicine.

APRN Recognition in Medicare Payment Reform

On July 31, 2013, the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee unanimously approved the Medicare Patient Access and Quality Improvement Act of 2013 (H.R. 2810). A bipartisan amendment to the bill
offered by Representatives Michael Burgess, MD (R-TX) and Frank Pallone (D-NJ) clarifies the definition of eligible organizations to include Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) among those that can contribute to clinical improvement and quality measures development. In addition, the amendment provides for nurse practitioners and physician assistants to be able to bill Medicare for complex chronic care coordination services, a practice that according to the law has been reserved to physicians.

AACN collaborated with its APRN colleagues to submit comments to the Committee in support of these provisions. To read these comments, see: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs/APRN-HEC-SGR.pdf.

The full text of H.R. 2810 can be found here: http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c113:H.R.2810.IH:.

**New Legislation Includes APRNs in Primary Care Reimbursement**

On August 2, 2013, Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) introduced the Protecting Access to Primary Care Act (H.R. 2986). The intent of the legislation is to increase the number of providers who accept and treat Medicaid patients by extending the primary care Medicaid reimbursement rates for Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs), Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs), and Physician Assistants. The primary care reimbursement increase is a two-year provision created through the ACA that is currently limited to physicians. Rep. Bonamici’s legislation would amend this provision to recognize other primary care providers and ensure they are reimbursed for these services. AACN applauds this effort to increase access to primary care by recognizing NPs, CNSs, and CNMs within this population.


The full text of H.R. 2986 can be found here: http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr2986.

**AACN Submits Comments on the Higher Education Act Reauthorization**

In response to a request for comments from the House Committee on Education and the Workforce concerning the pending reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) [Pub. L. No. 89-329], AACN submitted comments on behalf of our nursing students and the broader community of health professions students. AACN’s comments supported increasing diversity in higher education; addressing the high debt accrued by health professions students; reducing the regulatory burden faced by academic institutions, especially with regards to the state authorization regulations; amending the Loan Forgiveness in Areas of National Need (LFANN) program to include APRNs in the definition of eligible individuals; and amending the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program to include the Department of Health and Human Services in the list of agencies the Secretary may consult in administering the program.

In addition, AACN spearheaded comments offered by the APRN community that also supported the changes to the LFANN and GAANN programs. AACN continues to collaborate with its colleagues in the higher education community and also supported broader recommendations put forth from the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Federation of Associations of Schools of Health Professions (FASHP) coalition on multiple issues, including ways to improve federal student loans.

To access AACN’s comments to the Committee, see: http://www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs.
President Signs Bipartisan Student Loan Measure

On August 8, 2013, interest rates on federally subsidized Stafford loans were adjusted when President Obama signed into law the Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act of 2013 [Public Law No: 113-028]. The new law ties student loan interest rates to the 10-year Treasury note, in addition to retroactively reversing the July 1st doubling on interest rates to subsidized Stafford student loans.

All new loans will have interest rates fixed at the time they were taken out. For this year, subsidized and unsubsidized undergraduate loan rates will be set at 3.86%, rates on unsubsidized graduate loans will be set at 5.41%, and rates on PLUS loans (available to graduate students and parents) will be set at 6.41%. While rates are fixed through the duration of the loan, it is possible that year to year rates may change, thus leaving students with loans each having a different interest rate. In addition, caps were placed on student interest rates: 8.25% for undergraduate loans, 9.5% for graduate loans, and 10.5% for PLUS loans.

New Director of AHRQ Announced

On August 19, 2013, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that Richard Konick, PhD, will serve as the new Director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) when current Director Carolyln Clancy departs at the end of this month. Since 2010, Dr. Konick has served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and oversaw the Office of Health Policy within HHS. In addition to extensive health policy research, he has served in leadership roles including Director of Policy and Reimbursement for the Medicaid Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare and as Professor and Chief of the Division of Health Care Sciences in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of California, San Diego.


Former AACN President Featured in The Health Care Blog

Kathleen Potempa, PhD, RN, FAAN, Dean of the University of Michigan School of Nursing and former AACN president, wrote a recent article for The Health Care Blog called “Nurses Will Play a Vital Role in the Enactment of the Affordable Care Act.” In the article, Dr. Potempa argues that nurses are uniquely positioned to assist with the upcoming changes in the healthcare system. She writes:

“Though nurses already play a central role in cost containment, care quality, and patient safety, current trends in nursing education have us poised for even greater contributions. That’s because good baccalaureate and graduate programs in nursing increasingly incorporate quality improvement in care settings. Through attention to ‘microsystem’ processes, we work toward better outcomes not only for individuals but also for health systems as a whole. Nursing prepares leaders, administrators, and researchers who can improve care processes and related analytics around outcomes and cost.”

As the provisions in the Affordable Care Act are implemented, Dr. Potempa believes nurses will have increased opportunities to use their expertise in preventive care, patient communication, and care coordination that are the hallmark of their practice. In the coming months, the nation will be looking to nurses to help explain the changes taking place and guide the future of the transformations. To read the article in its entirety and to post comments,
Funding Opportunity: 2014 NIH Transformative Research Awards

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is now accepting applications for the Transformative Research Awards 2014 funding cycle. These grants were created to fund promising research which is exceptionally innovative, high risk, or unconventional. Such research can often have profound results but execution is often inhibited by the risk involved. The NIH recognizes the potential of scientific exploration into novel areas and started the Transformative Research Awards to complement its more traditional program with projects that carry higher risk and the potential for higher reward.

Letters of Intent are due September 4, 2013 and complete applications must be submitted by October 4, 2013. Proposed projects may be in any field related to the NIH mission and should show clear potential to have a great impact in biomedical or behavioral research. For more information about the Transformative Research Awards, see: http://commonfund.nih.gov/TRA.

These awards are funded by the NIH Common Fund, established by Congress in 2006 to support interdisciplinary research across NIH Institutes or Centers. For more information about the Common Fund, see: http://commonfund.nih.gov/about.aspx.

HHS Releases Updated List of Health Professional Shortage Areas

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has concluded its annual assessment of its health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) and published the updated lists online. HPSAs are defined as having too few primary care, mental health, or dental health providers to adequately serve a particular population or geographical area of interest. While HHS strives to keep the HPSA lists up to date throughout the year, the annual review provides an opportunity to withdraw the designation from areas which have been able to progress beyond HPSA status over the past year. HPSA designations are used to determine eligibility and priority for many federal programs.

For example, primary care nurse practitioners, certified nurse midwives, and psychiatric nurse specialists are among the providers that may apply to the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program and registered nurses, APRNs, and nurse faculty may apply to the NURSE Corps Loan Repayment program. Through these programs, portions of participants’ student loans may be repaid in exchange for service in a designated HPSA.

For the most up to date list of HPSAs, see: http://www.hrsa.gov/shortage/find.html.

For more information about HPSAs, visit: http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/shortage/hpsas/index.html.

Bureau of Health Professions Seeks Director for Nursing

Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Health Professions (BHPPr) is accepting applications for the position of Director for Nursing. BHPPr programs work to ensure the health professions workforce is adequately serving the needs of our nation’s patients. Qualifications for the position include experience in nursing workforce education and training programs, an active nursing license, and demonstrated ability to managed and administer complex national programs. Applicants should also understand the transformation America’s healthcare delivery system is undergoing, as well as the vital nature of a team approach to healthcare workforce education and practice.

Applicants should submit resumes and letters of interest to: BHPPrAdmin@hrsa.gov by August 30, 2013.
HRSA Launches Care Counts: Educating Women and Families Challenge

Please see the following announcement from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA):

This new challenge from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) seeks to raise awareness about the new Health Insurance Marketplace and important benefits for women made possible by the Affordable Care Act. As open enrollment approaches, the Challenge offers an exciting chance to develop ways to disseminate information in English and Spanish regarding how Americans can find healthcare coverage that meets their needs at the Health Insurance Marketplace on HealthCare.gov. The Challenge also provides an opportunity for HHS to increase public awareness of the recommended preventive health services for women that are now covered without cost sharing because of the healthcare law.

Eligible entities include state, local, Tribal, or other non-governmental organizations. To be eligible to win a prize under the Challenge, a team:

- Shall have registered to participate in the Challenge under the Official Rules;
- Shall be comprised of at least two (2) persons, preferably with a combination of technical expertise that may include design, social media, public health, and health communications expertise. Multi-disciplinary teams are encouraged to apply;
- In the case of a private entity, shall be incorporated in and maintain a primary place of business in the U.S.
- All persons must be at least eighteen (18) years old at the time of entry and a citizen or permanent resident of the United States;
- Shall have complied with all the requirements set forth herein; and
- May not be a federal entity or Federal employee acting within the scope of their employment.

The categories for submission include English print, web-based, or social media and Spanish print, web-based, or social media.

First and Second Place Prizes will be given in the following categories:

1) English print, web-based, or social media
2) Spanish print, web-based, or social media

Winners will be recognized by the HRSA Administrator, and a total of $25,000 in prizes will be awarded. Submissions are currently being accepted. The deadline for submissions is 11:00 PM EDT on August 30, 2013.

To submit an entry or obtain additional information on the Care Counts: Educating Women and Families Challenge, please visit www.carecounts.challenge.gov.

For more information and programs from HRSA, visit: http://www.hrsa.gov/index.htm.

Nominate a Hypertension Control Champion

Million Hearts, a national initiative to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes among the American public by 2017, has announced the 2013 Million Hearts Hypertension Control Challenge to recognize providers of exceptional care in this area. Primary care clinicians, practices, and health systems who have realized hypertension control rates of greater than 70% among their patients are eligible to enter. Champions will be recognized by the Centers
for Disease Control and Prevention.  
An estimated 36 million Americans suffer from uncontrolled high blood pressure, although many are currently being treated for this condition. Each day, nearly 1,000 people die in the United States as a result of high blood pressure-related illnesses. The Million Hearts challenge seeks to address this issue by highlighting healthcare providers who are able to achieve excellence in hypertension control. To nominate a Hypertension Control Champion, visit: http://www.mhhypertensionchallenge.com/. Nominations will be accepted until September 9, 2013. 

The Million Hearts program is a joint endeavor between U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. AACN is proud to partner with the federal government for this important initiative. To learn more about Million Hearts, see http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/index.html.

New Grant Builds Pathways to Nursing Education for Veterans

The Health Resources and Services Administration’s Bureau of Health Professions has announced a new funding opportunity to explore ways to transition military veterans to careers in the healthcare field. The Veterans to Nurses and Physician Assistants Workforce Program aims to identify, develop, disseminate, and analyze education pathways, or career ladder programs, which build upon veterans’ prior military training and experience. Recipients of this grant will also work with HRSA and the recipients of the Veteran’s Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing program to identify solutions to the unique challenges veterans face as they seek higher education and meaningful employment in civilian life.


To apply, visit: http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do;jsessionid=wvdJRxyfblBtFnDY8nmFdNzsKQvvdTyDshn0ZPGrxsXJpkXhCsB1-l-1619528001?oppId=238436&mode=VIEW.