News briefs

Save the date: First Policy Council forum set
The MMA will hold its first Policy Council forum on Saturday, April 26, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The topic and location for the forum, which will be open to all Minnesota physicians, are yet to be determined. Look to upcoming editions of MMA News Now for details.

The House of Delegates voted to form a Policy Council at the 2013 MMA Annual Meeting and create a simplified process for obtaining broad member input on critical health policy issues facing Minnesota physicians.

For more information on the make-up of the 40-member council, visit www.mnmed.org/PolicyCouncil.

MN ranks third in health poll
Minnesota is considered the third healthiest state in the nation, according to America’s Health Rankings.

For the second year in a row, Hawaii ranked first, Vermont second and Minnesota third. Minnesota has landed in the top spot seven times in the rankings’ 24-year history.

America’s Health Rankings looks at four determinants of health: everyday patient behaviors; the community and environment; public and health policy; and clinical care. It also considers factors such as smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, binge drinking, high school graduation rates, percentage of children in poverty, access to medical care, and incidence of preventable disease.

Minnesota scored above the national norm in all categories except for those relating to pertussis, binge drinking, public health funding, and immunization rates for adolescents and children.

The report is based on data from the U.S. departments of Health and Human Services, Commerce, Education, Justice and Labor; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Census Bureau; the American Medical Association; the American Dental Association; the Dartmouth Atlas Project; and the Trust for America’s Health.

Physicians and APRNs meet to discuss practice scope
Last December, representatives from the MMA met with members of a coalition that wants to expand nurses’ scope of practice in Minnesota to discuss an issue that will likely see legislation during the session that begins February 25.

Discussion focused on the need for continued collaboration, potential changes to the required written prescribing agreement, growing concern about the overuse of opioids and the qualifications needed to administer interventional pain medicine.

“There continues to be some areas where compromise can be reached and other areas where there are strong differences,” says Dave Renner, the MMA’s director of state and legislative affairs. “We’ll continue to focus on what is best for optimal patient care and the data that clearly show that collaboration and a team approach to care are the best.”

The Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) coalition continues to push for complete independent practice for APRNs with a broad scope of practice. Coalition representatives acknowledged at the meeting that they may need to compromise to get a bill that would change APRNs’ scope of practice passed in Minnesota. How much both sides are willing to move will determine whether such a bill moves forward this session.

Physicians at the meeting represented family medicine, emergency medicine, anesthesiology, psychiatry and interventional pain medicine. Nurses in attendance represented certified nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse midwives and clinical nurse specialists.
Congress inches closer to SGR repeal
Before leaving Washington in December, the Senate and House of Representatives passed a three-month Medicare physician payment bridge that replaces the 24 percent cut to payments scheduled for January 1. The bridge not only stopped the cut but also included a 0.5 percent payment update. President Obama signed the legislation into law on December 24.

The bridge isn’t a repeal of the Medicare sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula, but it’s a move in that direction.

“We are encouraged that Congress is finally poised to do away with SGR,” says Dave Renner, the MMA’s director of state and federal legislation. “We had hoped they’d get it done by the end of this year but we’ll be satisfied if it happened in the first quarter of 2014.”

Minnesota one of top two states for quality transparency
Minnesota and Washington are the only states in the nation to receive an “A” for providing patients with reports on physician quality. The grade is based on a study conducted by the Health Care Incentives Improvement Institute, a nonprofit that designs programs aimed at boosting health care quality and affordability.

The report based its grades on the percentage of doctors rated in each state, whether those ratings included information about patient outcomes and consumer experiences, and how easy it was to find ratings through an online search.

California received a “C,” and Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin received “Ds.” The remaining states received “Fs.”

“It’s nice to see Minnesota get an A, but it’s concerning to see so many states do so poorly in this study,” says Barbara Daiker, the MMA’s quality manager.

The report’s co-author, Francois de Brantes, said he was shocked because he thought information on the quality of physicians was far more available. “It’s a very mixed bag,” he told Kaiser Health News.

Growth rate on Minnesota health care costs slows
Health care costs increased by only 2 percent during 2011, which, combined with the growth rate for the previous year, results in the lowest two-year growth since the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) began measuring spending in the mid-1990s.

The report, which was prepared by MDH’s Health Economics Program, compares projected spending and estimated actual spending, of which the calculated difference is defined as the savings associated with the implementation of Minnesota’s 2008 health reform law. The analysis suggests that Minnesota is spending less per person than the national average.

The report also indicated that without addressing the drivers of health care spending or implementing reforms to curb spending growth, Minnesota’s health care spending is expected to increase by more than double over the next decade. However, for 2011, actual spending fell short of projected levels by 5.4 percent.

LSMS hands out annual awards
The Lake Superior Medical Society (LSMS) handed out its annual awards for “Physician of the Year” and several other top honors in December.

David Sproat, M.D., was named Physician of the Year for “consistently demonstrating qualities recognized as defining
excellence in medical care delivery.” During the past 10 years, Sproat’s patients at Duluth Internal Medicine Associates have sent in numerous nominations commending his exceptional work.

Linda Van Etta, M.D., of St. Luke’s Infectious Disease Associates, received the Thomas A. Stolee Exceptional Dedication to the Practice of Medicine Award, which is given to a member physician who has demonstrated a lifetime of exceptional dedication to the practice of medicine.

Nicholas Van Deelen, M.D., received the John B. Sanford Community Service Award, which is given to a member physician who has demonstrated exemplary service to the community through extensive volunteer activities outside the field of medicine.

Paul Sanford, M.D., of St. Luke’s Internal Medicine Associates, received the President’s Award, which is given in recognition of personal, professional and community contributions to our profession.

Theresa Smith, M.D., of Essentia Health, was awarded the Elizabeth C. Bagley Merit Award, which is given in recognition of commitment to the medical profession and the LSMS.

Maria Barrell, M.D., a recent graduate from the Duluth Family Practice Residency Program, was awarded the Educator Award, which is given in recognition of excellence in teaching and education.

Jay Knuths, M.D., of St. Luke’s Internal Medicine Associates, was awarded the 2013 LSMS President’s Gavel Plaque, in appreciation of outstanding leadership and commitment to the LSMS.

Member named top financial adviser
MMA member Joel Greenwald, M.D., C.F.P., of Greenwald Wealth Management, is one of three Minnesota financial advisers to be named Best Financial Adviser for Doctors by Medical Economics magazine. St. Louis Park-based Greenwald Wealth Management focuses exclusively on financial planning for physicians and dentists.

New Young Physicians Section leaders named
The MMA’s Young Physicians Section leaders for 2014 are:
Dionne Hart, M.D., a psychiatrist at Federal Medical Center in Rochester, chair; Meltiady Issa, M.D., who practices internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic, vice chair; Neel Shah, M.D., an internal medicine physician at the Mayo Clinic, YPS representative to the MMA’s board of trustees; and Monjur Alam, M.D., a family physician at Sanford East Grand Forks, member-at-large.

MMA in action
MMA President Cindy Firkins Smith, M.D.; Terry Ruane, MMA director of membership, marketing and communications; Kathleen Baumbach, an MMA manager of physician outreach; and Dennis Kelly, MMA Foundation CEO, attended the Zumbro Valley Medical Society annual meeting in January.

Smith also attended the Minnesota Psychiatry Society board of trustees meeting. Mandy Rubenstein, an MMA manager of physician outreach, and Juliana Milhofer, an MMA policy analyst, met with members at Sanford East Grand Forks to discuss the primary care physician workforce shortage. Rubenstein also represented the MMA at an awards ceremony honoring Robert Bösli, M.D., as “Country Doctor of the Year” in Starbuck. In mid-January, Jacob Prunuske, M.D., of Lake Superior Community Health Center in Duluth, Milhofer and Baumbach, discussed the primary care physician workforce shortage with physicians at Regina Medical Center in Hastings.