News briefs

Registration now open for 2014 Annual Conference

Physicians will have the opportunity to hear national and local speakers, earn 8.5 CME credits and participate in policy discussions at the MMA’s 2014 Annual Conference, which takes place September 19 and 20 at Madden’s on Gull Lake in Brainerd.

“Thriving in Change: Meeting the Challenges of Modern Medicine” will feature sessions on organizational, team and personal leadership; physician well-being; how to avoid burnout; and innovation and technology. It will also offer a lively gubernatorial debate and three MMA policy forums.

For more information and to register, visit www.mnmed.org/AC2014.

Stearns Benton campaign leads to fewer pertussis cases

A campaign to eliminate whooping cough in the St. Cloud area appears to be working, according to the Minnesota Department of Health.

The Central Minnesota Community Immunization Campaign kicked off in May 2013 with the goal of eliminating whooping cough by promoting the importance of vaccinations in Stearns and Benton counties.

In 2012, there were 165 cases of pertussis in those counties. In 2013, the number decreased nearly 50 percent to 84 cases.

A St. Cloud Walgreen’s reported a 254 percent increase in the number of vaccinations given between the November prior to the campaign and the November after the launch. The Stearns Benton Medical Society helped fund nearly 20 percent of those vaccinations.

The campaign was created by several St. Cloud-area community partners that were brought together by the Stearns Benton Medical Society.

MMA members to decide new uses for state database

MMA members Roger Kathol, M.D., and John Chandler, M.D., have been appointed to a work group that will explore new uses for the state’s all-payer claims database.

The group will develop recommendations on the parameters for future allowable uses, the type of governing body that should guide the release of data, the type of funding or fee structure needed to support expanded use, and the sort of privacy and security protections that are needed. The group’s report is due to the Legislature by February 1, 2015.

Kathol, also an MMA board member, is founder and president of Cartesian Solution, Inc. Chandler is chief health information officer for analytics and informatics at Hennepin County Medical Center.

MMA urges end to health care violence

The MMA, along with five other state health care organizations, is calling for making workplace violence prevention a top priority.

The coalition, which consists of the MMA, the Minnesota Department of Health, the Minnesota Hospital Association, Aging Services of Minnesota, Care Providers of Minnesota and the Minnesota Nurses Association, defines violence in health care as “behaviors including physical violence and threats that make employees, visitors, patients and residents concerned for their personal safety.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 81,000 health care industry workers nationally were assaulted during a 15-month

Upcoming MMA Events

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Check the MMA’s website (www.mnmed.org/events) for more information and to register.
period in 2003-2004 (the most recent data). Federal workplace injury data show that physicians, nurses and mental health workers are more likely than others to be assaulted on the job. The share of health care employees who missed work because of injuries caused intentionally by others was 6.5 per 10,000 workers in 2011—four times the overall U.S. rate.

Forum examines health disparities in Minnesota
About 75 physicians, residents, medical students and public health workers gathered in St. Paul in mid-June to discuss Minnesota’s health and health care disparities, and to help inform the MMA’s efforts to encourage and support physician leadership in reducing disparities between racial and ethnic groups.

The event, titled “Closing the Gap: Addressing Minnesota’s Health Disparities,” featured keynote speaker Edward Ehlinger, M.D., Minnesota Commissioner of Health, and a panel of physicians who shared their perspectives on working with underserved and minority populations.

Ehlinger touted the health of the population overall and the quality of health care in the state, including Minnesota’s ranking as one of the healthiest states in the nation. But he then added, “The good life of Minnesota is not being experienced by everybody,” and provided disturbing data illustrating the gap between the health of the overall population and that of various minority groups. “We have some of the greatest disparities in the country when it comes to infant mortality,” he said.

Ehlinger said that to begin to remedy the problem, the state needs to recognize disparities as unacceptable and make achieving health equity a goal. He called for health care, communities of color, social services, and political and corporate leaders to work together to achieve that goal. He talked about the multiple social determinants of health and noted that medical care is only part of the problem. “We can’t treat our way to health equity,” he said.

After Ehlinger’s talk, Walter B. Franz III, M.D., of Mayo Clinic, Tamiko Morgan, M.D., FAAP, of Metropolitan Health Plan, and Shana Sniffen, M.D., of HealthEast Roselawn Clinic, shared their experiences and then answered audience questions.

Following the discussion, the MMA surveyed attendees about a number of topics. They found:

- About 70 percent said they were either confident or very confident that increasing the diversity of the physician workforce would help reduce health disparities.
- 42 percent said Minnesota physicians and other health care providers unfairly treat people based on their race somewhat often, 26 percent said it happens often often, and 13 percent said it happens very often.
- 47 percent said financial insecurity is the main barrier to improving racial/ethnic health disparities.

Member receives pediatric award
MMA member Daniel Broughton, M.D., FAAP, received the 2014 Distinguished Service Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MNAAP) at the group’s annual meeting in June.

Broughton, a past president of MNAAP, has been an advocate for abused and neglected children. He was a founding member and eventual chair of the board of directors for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. He was also instrumental in starting and became the medical director of the Mayo Clinic Children’s Advocacy Center and Mayo Clinic Family Advocacy Program.

St. Cloud doctors unite to battle opioid abuse
Nearly 50 St. Cloud area physicians, pharmacists, nurses and community volunteers met in June to discuss the prescription opioid crisis. The event was sponsored by Stearns Benton Medical Society.

“It was a very good discussion,” says Patrick Zook, M.D., president of the medical society. “The ultimate goal and prime motivation of the group is to develop community guidelines and policies for handling controlled substances.”

During the meeting, participants broke into small groups to discuss the problem and how to address it as a community.
They identified several factors that contribute to opioid abuse: inconsistent diagnosis and treatment, the inability to determine whether a patient is actually in pain, not being able to share records across systems and societal pressure to be 100 percent “pain free.”

The group also discussed possible solutions to the problem including working toward consistency in prescribing, encouraging the use of the state’s Prescription Monitoring Program, developing and sharing best practices, creating a contract that patients sign vowing not to abuse opioids, and not giving out prescriptions for opioids at the first visit.

The group plans to meet again in August.

**MMA Foundation launches volunteer program**

The MMA Foundation (MMAF) introduced its new Physician Volunteerism Program (PVP) in June.

“The program was created as a result of a survey of Minnesota physicians,” says Dennis Kelly, MMAF CEO. “We received a lot of enthusiastic support for the idea of creating a volunteer resource specifically for physicians.”

Nearly 70 percent of the 726 respondents indicated that they had already volunteered in some capacity during the last year, and more than 90 percent said they would volunteer if they could find the right opportunity. Respondents represented a range of specialties. Full-time, part-time and retired physicians were all represented in significant numbers, too.

After the physician survey, MMAF staff interviewed and surveyed community clinics and found they have a need for volunteer physicians and were willing to use the program as a resource to reach physician volunteers.

The MMAF is now testing the concept, working out bugs and trying to discover the most effective ways to attract potential volunteers to the program. During this pilot phase, the website features volunteer positions for primary care and a selection of other specialties at a limited number of community clinic sites in the Twin Cities.

“With the learnings from the pilot phase, we will expand the program,” Kelly says. “We expect the PVP to grow into a statewide resource for physicians, community clinics and others.”

Read more about the program at www.mmafoundation.org/Making-a-Difference/Physician-Volunteerism-Program.

**MMA in action**

**Cindy Firkins Smith,** M.D., MMA president, and **Eric Dick,** MMA manager of state legislative affairs, attended a celebration of the passage of the Tan-Free Kids legislation in St. Paul in June. The event, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, honored the authors of the legislation, Rep. JoAnn Ward (DFL-Woodbury) and Sen. Chris Eaton (DFL-Brooklyn Center). Both the Minnesota Dermatological Society and the MMA were recognized as key partners in the successful effort to bar minors’ access to artificial tanning facilities.

**Dave Thorson,** M.D., MMA board chair, and **Janet Silversmith,** MMA director of health policy, attended The Physicians Foundation Physician Leadership Academy at Duke University in North Carolina in mid-June.

**Robert Meiches,** M.D., MMA CEO, Silversmith, Dick, **Teresa Knoedler,** J.D., MMA policy counsel, **Juliana Milhofer,** MMA policy analyst and **Barbara Daiker,** MMA manager of quality, met in early July with staff from the Minnesota Hospital Association to talk about post-session follow-up, the all-payer claims database work group, the health care workforce and other issues.

Daiker represented MMA at the Minnesota Department of Health public hearing on the Statewide Quality Reporting and Measurement System measures for 2015 in late June in St. Paul.

In mid-June, **Terry Ruane,** MMA director of membership, marketing and communications, **Brian Strub,** MMA manager of physician outreach, and **Evelyn Clark,** MMA manager of grassroots and political engagement, exhibited at the University of Minnesota’s resident and fellow orientation day in the Mayo Auditorium on the Minneapolis campus. The trio discussed the value of the MMA and the programs it offers residents. Ruane and Strub also exhibited at the University of Minnesota Family Medicine resident orientation on the university’s St. Paul campus.

**Mandy Rubenstein,** MMA manager of physician outreach, represented the MMA at the Stearns Benton Medical Society’s event on “Bringing our Community Together—Solutions to the Opioid Crisis” in late June.