News Briefs

Forum explores single payer in Minnesota

More than 60 physicians and medical students gathered on the University of Minnesota St. Paul campus in mid-August to learn about single payer and whether it’s viable in Minnesota.

Following the forum, the MMA polled the group to gauge its view of single payer. Three-fourths of the attendees said that the single greatest potential of a single-payer system is to provide guaranteed/universal coverage. Thirty-one percent said the single biggest limitation was obtaining sustainable financing.

“As family physicians, knowing that our patients have coverage and can afford care is important,” said Christopher Reif, M.D., a family physician with Community University Health Care Center and member of a Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians (MAFP) task force that studied the single-payer concept last year. “We see this as a dialogue that will go on for years and wanted to be part of the conversation, and to do that we felt we needed to be educated more.”

MMA member Dave Dvorak, M.D., M.P.H., an emergency physician at Fairview Southdale Hospital and a member of the Minnesota chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP), presented the case for single payer. “We have a complicated system of insurance coverage,” he said. “It’s disorganized and highly inefficient, and the ACA doesn’t change this mish-mash. It just adds layers.” He noted that when he went on MNsure, the state’s health insurance exchange, he was presented with 66 different potential health plan choices.

Some of the benefits, he noted, are that single payer:

• Offers potential for cost control (currently, 31 percent of health care dollars go toward administration)
• Would reduce administrative burden (In the United States, physicians spend 21 hours a week on paperwork and prior authorization; in Canada they spend 2.5 hours a week.)
• Offers an opportunity to negotiate prices for drugs and services
• Would ensure a larger percentage of the population is insured (Dvorak said that even with implementation of the ACA, 30 million Americans are still uninsured and many more are underinsured.)

Downsides discussed included the political infeasibility of such a system, the perception that single payer would raise taxes, its vulnerability during times of recession, and the fact that thousands of insurance and administrative jobs would be lost as a result.

Lynn Blewett, Ph.D., professor of health policy at the University of Minnesota, provided an overview of single payer and described the experiences of four countries—the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway and Germany. She also described Vermont’s plan to build a single-payer system by 2017.

The event was co-sponsored by the MMA, MAFP and the Minnesota Chapter of PHNP.

MMA debuts live stream service for members

For the past few years, MMA members in greater Minnesota have asked that metro-based events be broadcast so they, too, could take part. The MMA used live streaming technology to do just that for its recent single-payer forum.

Nearly 50 members outside the Twin Cities metro area were able to “attend” the event and submit questions via the Internet. For a fee, they could watch the forum online either individually or as a group. Twenty-five people watched at a gathering in Duluth, and 12 watched together in Detroit Lakes. Eleven members watched individually.

“I’d say it was a great success,” says Cindy Firkins Smith, M.D., MMA president who moderated the live forum that took place at the University of Minnesota Continuing Education and Conference Center in St. Paul. “It’s our goal to engage all Minnesota physicians at the MMA. So to have that many docs watching online and submitting all of their questions and comments was awesome.”

Upcoming MMA Events

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<td>“Care Where it Counts” MMA Foundation Fundraiser</td>
<td>October 9</td>
<td>University of Minnesota McNamara Center</td>
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<td>Choosing Wisely Guthrie Workshop</td>
<td>October 11 or October 30</td>
<td>Guthrie Theater</td>
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<td>Quality Measurement Summit</td>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>Double Tree by Hilton, Bloomington</td>
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Check the MMA’s website (www.mnmed.org/events) for more information and to register.
New “Inspiring Physicians” page debuts on MMA website

The MMA has launched a new section on its website highlighting Minnesota physicians who go above and beyond the call of duty.

“The Inspiring Physicians site is focused on promoting the image of physicians in the state and supporting our strategy of advancing the role of professionalism in medicine by promoting our members,” says Robert Meiches, M.D., MMA CEO. “It's a nice way to spotlight the great work by our members.”

The first group of members to be featured include:

Robert Bösl, M.D.
The lone physician in Starbuck, Minnesota, was named the 2013 Country Doctor of the Year by Staff Care. He used his retirement savings to open a clinic after the town's only hospital closed in 2005.

Brian Sick, M.D.
Since 2007, Sick has served as the volunteer medical director for the Phillips Neighborhood Clinic, a free clinic that sees more than 1,100 patients annually. Sick received an MMA Community Service Award for his work with the clinic.

Dionne Hart, M.D.
This spring, the Minnesota Psychiatric Society named Hart its Psychiatrist of the Year for 2014. Last November, she received the MMA Foundation's 2013 Minority Affairs Meritorious Service Award.

Know an inspiring physician who deserves recognition? Send your suggestions to dhauser@mnmed.org.

2014-2015 officers elected electronically

In the first-ever electronic election for the MMA, members have selected the 2014-2015 president-elect, three new board members and AMA delegates.

Last fall, the House of Delegates voted to establish member-wide electronic elections in order to allow all members the opportunity to vote. Nominations came in from component medical societies, specialty societies and individual members. These choices were vetted by the MMA Nominating Committee.

Ballots were mailed in late July to all members with email addresses on file with the MMA. A total of 486 members voted, which is 5.6 percent of those who were eligible.

The following members were voted into office:

- President-elect – Dave Thorson, M.D.
- North Central Trustee District board member – Marilyn Peitso, M.D.
- At-large board positions – Edwin Bogonko, M.D., and Doug Wood, M.D.
- AMA delegates – David Estrin, M.D., and Benjamin Whitten, M.D.
- AMA alternate delegates – David Luehr, M.D., Will Nicholson, M.D., and Cindy Firkins Smith, M.D.

MMA, TCMS Host Clinic Leaders

The Clinic Leadership Luncheon Series continued in August as the MMA and the Twin Cities Medical Society co-hosted a dozen clinic administrators and key clinic staff at MMA headquarters.

The session, “Five ways to get the most out of your mandated quality measurement and patient experience data,” was led by Barbara Daiker, Ph.D., FACMPE, the MMA's quality manager. Clinic leaders shared ideas and learned about trends in measurement, current mandated measurements, managing quality and improving patient satisfaction.

Check the MMA's website (www.mnmed.org/events) for more information about upcoming sessions and to register.