News briefs

MMA launches contest to promote Choosing Wisely

MMA members have until July 1 to submit a short video (five minutes or less) promoting the Choosing Wisely campaign.

The entries will be judged by the MMA’s Choosing Wisely Advisory Committee; three contestants will win gift cards of $100, $200 or $300. Entries will also be considered for a People’s Choice award, in which all MMA members and nonmembers can vote for their favorite video. The People’s Choice winner will receive $100.

For more details go to www.mnmed.org/ChoosingWisely.

MMA and MMA Foundation hand out awards

In April, the MMA and MMA Foundation presented their annual quality, community service and excellence in medical journalism awards.

Tim Hernandez, M.D., (to the right) who leads the quality efforts at Entira Family Clinics, an independent 12-clinic practice in the St. Paul area, received the Physician Leadership in Quality Award.

In presenting the award, MMA CEO Robert Meiches, M.D., noted Hernandez’ long-standing involvement in quality efforts at both Entira and with various state groups including the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, Minnesota Community Measurement and the Community Health Network. Hernandez has also been involved with the Consultation for Mental and Substance Abuse Disorders Task Force and the Health Care Reform Baskets of Care Subcommittee on OB Care.

Brian Sick, M.D., received the Community Service Award for his work with the Phillips Neighborhood Clinic in south Minneapolis. Since 2007, Sick has acted as the free clinic’s medical director, volunteering his time to guide students in providing accessible, culturally appropriate, high-quality health care to those in need, and cultivate compassionate health care leaders.

KSTP-TV reporter Naomi Pescovitz (below) received the Excellence in Medical Journalism Award for a story the ABC affiliate aired in April 2013. The story concerned a team of doctors at the University of Minnesota (including MMA member John Wagner) that saved a 12-year-old’s life by curing him of HIV and leukemia. Pescovitz interviewed the doctors before and after the child received a cord blood transplant.

Each year, the MMA and the Foundation recognize Minnesota physicians for their work in the community and on quality efforts. The groups also recognize a print or broadcast journalist who has demonstrated excellence in communicating with the public on a topic related to medicine.

MMA teams up with state leaders on mental health initiative

Since the mid-March closure of Riverwood Centers Behavioral Health’s five offices in east central Minnesota, the MMA, the departments of health and human services, and other mental health advocates have been working to raise awareness and provide services to the reported 3,000 patients left without care.

In late March, several physicians, including MMA board members Randy Rice, M.D., and Roger Kathol, M.D., gathered in Cambridge for a group discussion on mental health needs in the Riverwood service area, which includes Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine counties.

Lucinda Jesson, state commissioner of human services, and MMA member Paul Goering, M.D., of Allina Health, led the meeting of nearly 100 mental health providers, health system leaders, state and county officials, patients and local advocates for mental health services.

The meeting included a discussion of the statewide needs for improved mental health services, an assessment by small workgroups of existing service gaps and ideas for serving the immediate needs of affected patients, and a discussion of next steps.

Participants discussed the usefulness of Fast-tracker, an online resource sponsored by the Minnesota Psychiatric Society that can be used to help connect patients with available mental health providers. Other steps include conducting a more local needs assessment and making plans to bring the group back together in three to six months to monitor and reassess the needs of patients and the community.
Riverwood Centers, formerly known as Five Counties Mental Health Centers, had offices in Braham, Cambridge, Milaca, Mora, Pine City and North Branch.

The MMA plans to help raise awareness about the crisis, identify resources and work with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health in providing a needed safety net for clients in the area. For more information on resources, visit www.mnmed.org/Advocacy/MentalHealthIssue.

Congress patches SGR, delays ICD-10 and “two midnight” rule

The day before a 24 percent physician payment cut was to take effect as part of the Medicare sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula, the U.S. Senate passed a measure postponing it until April 1, 2015. The House had passed a similar bill four days earlier, and President Obama signed the legislation into law. This was the 17th time Congress has approved a patch since SGR became law in 1997.

The MMA, AMA and dozens of other physician organizations lobbied Congress unsuccessfully for a full repeal of SGR.

“We are certainly disappointed with another temporary patch,” says Dave Renner, the MMA’s director of state and federal legislation. “We had bipartisan, bicameral support of an SGR repeal developed and making progress in Washington, and then lawmakers got cold feet.”

Congress also delayed implementation of ICD-10 until at least October 2015 and put off enforcement of the “two midnight” rule for six months. This new Medicare rule stipulates that hospital stays lasting fewer than two midnights must be treated and billed as outpatient services.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services had been pushing toward an October 2014 ICD-10 launch despite opposition from the AMA and other groups.

Now with 18 additional months to prepare, Minnesota physicians will be able to learn the fundamentals of the new coding system from two online, on-demand educational programs offered by the MMA in partnership with the Wisconsin Medical Society. The programs, which were developed by the Wisconsin society, provide a general overview for all physicians along with specific information about how ICD-10 will affect 20 different specialties. CME credit is available. Visit the MMA website (www.mnmed.org) for details.

National speakers announced for Annual Conference

Pieces are falling into place for the MMA’s new Annual Conference with the selection of two national speakers. The conference will take place September 19 and 20 at Madden’s on Gull Lake in Brainerd.

On Friday, September 19, attorney/author John Nance, J.D., will discuss the “Team Approach to Creative Problem Solving” and health care expert Quint Studer will discuss creating a culture of excellence in today’s fast-changing health care environment.

The morning activities, which will be presented jointly with the Minnesota Hospital Association and Aging Services of Minnesota, will be capped by a gubernatorial debate featuring incumbent Gov. Mark Dayton and his challengers.

“This year’s Annual Conference will be unlike any previous meeting,” says Mandy Rubenstein, MMA manager of physician outreach and the event’s organizer. “We are working on creating an inclusive event that really gets our members thinking about how health care and medicine are being transformed.”

In addition to talks by Nance and Studer and the gubernatorial debate, the conference will include a policy council meeting, policy forums, Saturday morning CME sessions, a poster symposium, and time for members and their families to enjoy the Brainerd Lakes area. In addition, the conference will feature leadership inaugurations, awards and networking opportunities.
June health disparities forum taking shape
The MMA continues to move forward with planning for its forum on Minnesota’s health disparities and inequities June 17 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Wilder Center in St. Paul.

Forum participants will hear keynote speaker Health Commissioner Edward Ehlinger, M.D., MSPH, discuss the health department’s efforts to address disparities and inequities in the state. In addition, the event will feature a panel including Shana Sniffen, M.D., from the HealthEast Roselawn Clinic and Tamiko Morgan, M.D., FAAP, CMO/medical director of Metropolitan Health Plan and an associate professor at the University of Minnesota.

The event will also provide an opportunity for physicians to share their best practices for working with minority populations and discuss what physicians can do to address health disparities.

The cost is $25 for members ($40 for nonmembers and $10 for students). The event is sponsored by the Minnesota Association of Black Physicians, the American Indian Cancer Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Health’s Office of Minority and Multicultural Health.

To register, visit www.mnmed.org/disparities.

MMA in action
Janet Silversmith, MMA director of health policy, presented on MNsure to a group of physicians at Sanford-Bemidji in mid-March. Silversmith, Teresa Knoedler, MMA’s policy counsel, MMA CEO Robert Meiches, M.D., and member George Schoephoerster, M.D., met with the Minnesota Council of Health Plans and medical directors from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Medica, HealthPartners, Preferred One and UCare to discuss prescription drug prior authorization processes. Meiches and Silversmith also took part in a telephone interview with Econometrica and the Urban Institute to analyze the state’s implementation of MNsure and the Affordable Care Act.

In mid-April, MMA President Cindy Firkins Smith, M.D.; Kathleen Baumbach, MMA manager of physician outreach; Eric Dick, MMA manager of state legislative affairs; and Dave Renner, MMA director of state and federal legislation, met with Minnesota Academy of Ophthalmology members in St. Paul. Smith also participated in a specialty society presidents’ update with Renner and attended a Minnesota Academy of Pediatrics board meeting with Dick.

Smith also attended the North Central Medical Conference in mid-March in Bloomington, the Wisconsin Medical Society annual meeting in early April, and the Iowa Medical Society annual meeting in mid-April.

Barbara Daiker, MMA manager of quality, presented on health care quality and measurement to physicians and staff of Sanford in Luverne in mid-March.

Juliana Milhofer, MMA policy analyst, attended the American Medical Association’s Commission to End Health Care Disparities spring meeting in Massachusetts in early April.

Brian Strub, MMA manager of physician outreach, Evelyn Clark, MMA manager of grassroots and political engagement, and Nancy Bauer of the Twin Cities Medical Society attended Transition Day at the University of Minnesota Medical School. This annual event is designed to help prepare second-year students to transition from the classroom to the clinical setting.

Several MMA staffers including Baumbach; Strub; Daiker; Mandy Rubenstein, MMA manager of physician outreach; and Terry Ruane, MMA director of membership, marketing and communications, attended the two-day Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians’ Spring Refresher in St. Paul.