News Briefs

Participation in state's medical cannabis program grows with addition of intractable pain
During the month of July, the state's medical cannabis program saw unprecedented growth in the number of patients signing up and health care providers joining. This is the result of the July 1 date for patients to begin meeting with physicians, physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses about using medical cannabis to treat intractable pain.

Starting August 1, intractable pain patients began picking up cannabis at one of the state's eight patient centers.

According to state law, intractable pain is pain whose cause cannot be removed and for which the full range of pain management treatments appropriate for the patient, according to generally accepted medical practice, have been used without adequate results or with intolerable side effects. As with others who qualify for participation in the program, intractable pain patients must be certified by either a physician, physician assistant or advanced practice registered nurse.

Nearly 500 patients with intractable pain joined the program in July, bringing the total number of approved patients to 1,827. The number of health care practitioners who approve patients also increased from 605 to 625 in July.

Physicians receive bad news from latest Avera Marshall ruling
In late July, the Minnesota Court of Appeals ruled against the medical staff of Avera Marshall Regional Medical Center and MMA members Steve Meister, MD, and Jane Willett, DO, (pictured) deciding that the hospital could unilaterally amend the medical staff bylaws that the hospital administration and staff had agreed to in 2010.

The court held that the language of the bylaws permitted unilateral amendment by the hospital, despite language indicating medical staff approval is a requisite part of the amendment process. This ruling applies to the interpretation of the specific medical staff bylaws at issue in the case. It does not necessarily apply to other medical staff bylaws that may contain different language regarding the amendment process.

The MMA, together with the AMA, has provided ongoing professional and financial support to the plaintiffs.

It's unlikely the case will be granted further review.

Work group meets to examine physician aid-in-dying question
A task force of physicians has begun re-examining the MMA's position on physician aid-in-dying. The MMA Board of Trustees created the task force following ongoing discussion and debate that began at the 2015 MMA Annual Conference and continued within the MMA's Policy Council.

The MMA's current policy, which dates back to 1992, opposes physician participation in aid-in-dying. In the nearly 25 years since the policy was set, a number of states have enacted laws allowing physicians to prescribe terminally ill patients drugs to end their lives. Some state medical societies—notably California's—have modified their positions away from organized medicine's historic opposition to physician aid-in-dying.

A proposal to allow physician aid-in-dying was introduced in the Minnesota Legislature in 2015, although it was only heard in one committee in the Senate and no official vote was recorded. Given the changing sentiment on the issue both within medicine and among the public, the Board of Trustees decided to re-examine the MMA's position.

The group is chaired by Benjamin Whitten, MD, a past MMA president and general internist at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. Other members include:
- Stuart Bloom, MD (oncology)
- Christopher Burkle, MD (anesthesiology)
- Ken Kephart, MD (palliative care)
- Jennifer Kuyava, MD (palliative care)
- Kathryn Lombardo, MD (psychiatry)
- Lisa Mattson, MD (OB/GYN)
- David Newcomer, DO (internal medicine)
- David Plimpton, MD (internal medicine)
- John Song, MD (internal medicine)
The task force is charged with crafting specific policy recommendations regarding physician aid-in-dying that will be considered by the Board at its November 2016 meeting. Additionally, the group is to identify educational resources that will help physicians understand and examine the clinical, practical, legal and policy issues associated with physician aid-in-dying.

The issue of physician aid-in-dying also will receive further discussion at a dedicated policy forum on September 23 at the MMA Annual Conference.

MMA part of coalition to encourage immunizations

The MMA is part of a nine-member coalition of health care groups that is encouraging Minnesota families to make sure their children are up to date on all of their recommended vaccines before heading off to school this fall. Strengthening the state’s immunization laws was one of the MMA’s top three priorities during the 2016 legislative session.

The Minnesota Department of Health reports that childhood immunization rates in Minnesota have remained stagnant.

Other members of the coalition include: Children’s Health Network, Immunization Action Coalition, Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Minnesota Childhood Immunization Coalition, Minnesota Head Start Association, Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners and the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota.

MMA re-doubles its efforts on prescription opioid abuse

In mid-July, the MMA’s Board of Trustees unanimously approved a list of recommendations related to the prescription opioid crisis including reconvening the MMA’s Prescription Opioid Management Advisory Task Force.

The task force, which first deliberated in 2012 and 2013, will meet the rest of this year and into 2017. It will develop recommendations for the MMA on the following topics:

• Circumstances for when mandatory use of the Minnesota Prescription Monitoring Program may be appropriate.
• Circumstances for when required education/additional training with respect to opioid prescribing may be appropriate.
• Strategies for expanding the number of buprenorphine providers.

The group will review the recommendations from the Department of Human Services’ Opioid Prescribing Work Group to help guide an MMA response.

Beth Baker, MD, who practices occupational medicine, will serve as chair. Other task force members include:

• Alfred Anderson, MD (pain medicine)
• Paul Biewen, MD (physical medicine and rehabilitation)
• Elisabeth Bilden, MD (emergency medicine/toxicology)
• William Dicks, MD (family medicine/pain medicine)
• Mark Eggen, MD (anesthesia)
• Tom Flynn, MD (oncology)
• Christopher Johnson, MD (emergency medicine)
• Charles Reznikoff, MD (addiction medicine)
• David Schultz, MD (anesthesia/pain medicine)
• Keith Stelter, MD (family medicine)
• Lindsey Thomas, MD (forensic pathology)
• Joseph Westermeyer, MD (addiction/substance abuse)

The MMA continues to educate Minnesota physicians on the topic through a series of free CME webinars it developed in partnership with the Steve Rummler Hope Foundation and the University of Minnesota Medical School. The goal of the webinars is to provide balanced, practical and evidence-based education on pain, opioids and addiction.

Member leads immigrant medical grad effort at White House

In his role as chair of the state’s International Medical Graduate (IMG) Stakeholder Group, MMA member Edwin Bogonko, MD, testified in late June at the White House regarding credentialing for immigrant and refugee physicians.

Bogonko visited Washington for the White House Task Force on New Americans. He was joined by Yende Anderson, IMG program coordinator for the state’s Office of Rural Health and Primary Care (ORHPC); Mark Schoenbaum, ORHPC director; and Wilhelmina Holder, a longtime advocate and stakeholder group member.

The IMG Stakeholder Group is working to develop strategies to leverage additional funding and explore changes in health professional licensure and regulation to ensure full utilization of immigrant international medical graduates in Minnesota’s health care delivery system.

On the calendar

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hippocrates Cafe</td>
<td>September 22</td>
<td>DoubleTree Park Place Hotel, St. Louis Park</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016 Annual Conference</td>
<td>September 23-24</td>
<td>DoubleTree Park Place Hotel, St. Louis Park</td>
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<td>Duluth Physicians’ Social</td>
<td>October 4</td>
<td>Harbor View Room, Fitger’s, Duluth</td>
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Check the MMA’s website (www.mnmed.org/events) for more information and to register.
Gov. appoints two members to mental health task force
Two MMA members have been appointed to the Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health: Paul Goering, MD, a psychiatrist with Allina Health in St. Paul, and Bruce Sutor, MD, a psychiatrist at the Mayo Clinic.

The task force will work to identify gaps in the state’s mental health system and propose comprehensive recommendations to design, implement and sustain a continuum of mental health services throughout Minnesota.

According to the governor’s office, more than 200,000 adults and 75,000 children in Minnesota live with mental illness. Over the last five years, Dayton and the Minnesota Legislature have invested more than $56 million in mental health initiatives, including $46 million for mental health crisis services, housing for adults with mental illness, funding to increase capacity at mental health facilities across the state and initiatives to improve children’s mental health. Additionally, Dayton has proposed significant investments in the Anoka Regional Treatment Center and the Minnesota Security Hospital in St. Peter.

The task force is to report to the governor, Legislature and the public by the end of November 2016.

Final 2016 Physicians’ Social scheduled for Duluth
Following in the footsteps of the successful Physicians’ Socials in Minneapolis and Rochester, the MMA will host an event in Duluth on Tuesday, October 4, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the Harbor View Room at Fitger’s, 600 E. Superior St. The event is a celebration of medicine, a thank you to members, and a welcome to new and prospective members. Hors d’oeuvres and drinks will be served. For more information, go to the MMA website (www.mnmed.org/socials).

MMA in Action
Dave Renner, the MMA’s director of state and federal legislation, attended the American Association of Medical Society Executives meeting in Baltimore in July where he discussed “Successful Campaigns,” speaking specifically about the MMA’s “Fix PA Now” campaign and the creation of the Fix PA Now Coalition. He co-presented with Rob Jorden from the AMA’s Washington, DC, office, who talked about the AMA’s “Break the Red Tape” campaign.

In July, Robert Meiches, MD, MMA CEO; Janet Silversmith, director of health policy; Renner; Teresa Knoedler, JD, policy counsel; Juliana Milhofer, policy analyst; and Eric Dick, manager of state legislative affairs, met with staff from the Minnesota Council of Health Plans to discuss medication prior authorization reform, MNsure, and the recent decision by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to exit the state’s health insurance exchange as well as other organizational updates.

In August, Silversmith gave a presentation on MACRA to Metro Urology. She will give a similar talk to Integrity Health Network in September.