News Briefs

Loan forgiveness receives early attention at Capitol
On day three of the 2015 Legislative session, state senators introduced a bill (SF3) that addresses loan forgiveness, one of the MMA’s top legislative priorities. The bill calls for creating a health professional education loan forgiveness program for a variety of health care professionals including physicians, nurses and dentists who agree to practice in designated rural areas or underserved urban communities. The bill is authored by Sen. Greg Clausen (DFL-Apple Valley), co-chair of the Legislative Health Care Workforce Commission. To be eligible for the program, individuals must agree to serve full time for a minimum of three years.

Total cost of care data released in December
In mid-December, MN Community Measurement released a first-of-its kind report on the total cost of care for patients in 115 medical groups, representing 1,052 clinics statewide. The analysis found that the average cost of medical care per patient is $435 a month. The average cost for adults is $514 per month, while the average cost for children is $216 per month. Eighty percent of the medical groups included in the report had total costs within the average range, with 6 percent of groups having costs below the average and 14 percent having costs above the average. The TCOC measure includes the allowed payment amounts (paid by both the health plan and any patient cost-sharing) for all services received by patients who were attributed to the medical group based on the majority of outpatient visits during the measurement year (2013). These services include: professional, facility inpatient and outpatient, pharmacy, lab, radiology, ancillary and behavioral health services provided directly by the medical group or externally.

MinnesotaCare is nation’s first Basic Health Program
On January 1, MinnesotaCare, the publically funded health insurance program for people unable to afford health insurance in the private market, became the nation’s first Basic Health Program (BHP). The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved Minnesota’s proposal in mid-December. This action allows the Department of Human Services to receive funding for MinnesotaCare under a new federal authority created by the Affordable Care Act that will help offset the state’s cost to run the program.

MMA adopts member-generated policies
The MMA has adopted new policies that grew out of ideas submitted by MMA members as part of the open-issues forum held at the 2014 Annual Conference in September. The policies address climate change; aligning MMA policy on abortion with AMA policy; placing age limits on tobacco and e-cigarette sales; reporting requirements for the National Practitioner Database; hospital admitting privileges; and use of APRNs. Eighteen policies were submitted and discussed at the Annual Conference forum. The MMA’s Policy Council deliberated on and revised several of the proposals. The Council decided to retain one item for future discussion. Four measures were not adopted, and seven were referred to MMA policy committees for further analysis. The Policy Council does not have independent decision-making authority, so its recommendations for policy on six items were submitted to the MMA Board of Trustees.

Minneapolis cardiologist receives 2014 Shotwell Award
The West Metro Medical Foundation of the Twin Cities Medical Society presented its 2014 Shotwell Award to Robert G. Hauser, MD, FACC, FHRS. The Shotwell Award is presented annually to a Minnesota physician who has made significant contributions in the field of health care. It was established by Metropolitan Medical Center in 1971.