

PRACTICE TRENDS EXITING PHYSICIANS ECONOMICS ASTHMA AND CFCs TECHNOLOGY MEDICAL ROBOTS

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**PHARMACY
BENEFIT
MANAGEMENT**

*Savings or
Shackles?*

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SPEAKING OUT

"Physicians and other clinicians who understand medical terminology but cannot speak the language of business-people are increasingly losing their autonomy and decision-making power within our health care system."

—Jerry Cammarata, PhD
professor, education consultant, and clinical health care consultant

CONSUMERS

THE POWER OF HEALTH CARE CONSUMERS

In the first-ever national study of the impact of consumers on health care, 72% of Americans surveyed agree that the health care industry is changing the way it operates due to consumer demands. The study, "New Voices: Consumerism in Health Care," also shows a broad consensus among health care industry leaders that consumers are influencing the policy, strategy, operations, and investment decisions in all segments of the industry. More than 84% of health care executives interviewed report initiatives reflecting consumerism in the marketplace.

Within this context, Rich D'Amaro, managing partner of KPMG's Health Care practice, recognizes a "major opportunity" for physicians. "Because physicians are, in many cases, the prime interface between consumers and the rest of the health care industry, adopting some of the consumerist strategies that are out there could have a profound impact on physicians—either by increasing market share or providing much better quality in terms of patient satisfaction," says D'Amaro.

The 18-month study is based on in-depth interviews with 321 leading executives at 70 health care organizations, a health care consumer survey of 1,812 households, and analyses of trends across industry and geographical areas. □

HEALTH PLANS'

HUMANA REACHES OUT TO PSOs

Although the managed care industry lobbied against the formation of provider sponsored organizations (PSOs) during last year's budget fight, one of its own is now prepared to work with this child of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

Humana Inc. has formed a new subsidiary, MedStep, to deliver a package of customized services that, according to the company, will make it possible for hospital and physician organizations to more quickly and efficiently research, design, administer, and pursue regulatory approval of their own health plans, particularly Medicare HMOs. According to Gregory H. Wolf, president and CEO

of Humana, the Balanced Budget Act will cause an increasing number of health care providers to consider forming PSOs. Providers who go this route will face the challenges of building "the operating infrastructure, necessary systems architecture, and risk management capabilities and to establish complex distribution relationships." And that is where MedStep comes in.

According to a company spokesperson, MedStep will be paid for up-front consulting and analysis on a fee basis. Once a PSO is off the ground, the Humana subsidiary will receive a percentage of a PSO's annual per-enrollee reimbursement for subsequent services. □

PATIENT ADVOCACY

AMA SIDES WITH HIV-POSITIVE PATIENTS

In an apparent message to physicians, the AMA recently filed an amicus curiae brief in the case of *Bragdon vs. Abbott* currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. The brief states that the AMA considers it unethical and illegal for physicians and dentists not to treat patients who are HIV-positive solely because of their HIV status.

The incidents leading up to *Bragdon vs. Abbott* began when Ms. Sidney Abbott went to Dr. Randon Bragdon, a dentist in Bangor, Maine, to have a cavity filled. After she disclosed her HIV-positive status on a patient information form, Bragdon refused to treat her in his office and instead insisted that she have her tooth filled in a hospital more than 100 miles away. Abbott filed suit against the dentist in federal court, alleging violations of the Americans With Disabilities Act. A federal district judge ruled that Bragdon had violated the law, and the First Circuit Court of Appeals agreed. Bragdon appealed to the Supreme Court, which has agreed to hear the case.



According to the AMA, this case will give the Supreme Court an opportunity to clarify protections against bias for people who are HIV-positive but have not yet developed AIDS. "People who are HIV-positive should not be subjected to discrimination based on fear or prejudice," says Yank Coble, MD, a member of the AMA's Board of Trustees. According to the AMA's Code of Medical Ethics, "a physician may not ethically refuse to treat a patient whose condition is within the physician's current realm of competence solely because the patient is HIV-positive." Coble notes that "the consensus of medical opinion is that there is no significant risk of transmission of HIV from patient to doctor or dentist as long as we adhere to easily followed universal precautions." Data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention document only 42 known cases of HIV infection involving patient care. □