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ADVOCACY NEWS

ACR on Capitol Hill

On March 15, the Executive Committee, and members of the Government Affairs Committee, RheumPAC committee and the Affiliated Society Council met on Capitol Hill with members of Congress to discuss issues affecting the rheumatology profession and patient access to specialty care. Our message needs to be heard in every Congressional office, so we are asking all ACR and ARHP members to join the ACR's advocacy efforts and reach out to your members of Congress this week. Topics being discussed include:

- What is a rheumatologist?
- Continued funding for arthritis research
- Reinstatement of consultation codes
- Permanent fix to the SGR
- Adequate reimbursement for bone density scans

Educate Congress on the Value of Rheumatology

Most members of Congress, new or experienced, know little about the rheumatology subspecialty and the unique issues facing rheumatology professionals and patients. This is why it is critical that ACR and ARHP members educate elected officials on the importance of specialty care and the impact arthritis and rheumatic diseases have on one's quality of life. Review the ['What is a Rheumatologist' issue brief](#) and then reach out to your legislators.

Contacting Your Members of Congress is Easy

Call your members of Congress using the AMA Grassroots Hotline: (800) 833-6354 or send an e-mail through the ACR Legislative Action Center at www.rheumatology.org/advocacy.

Need help crafting your message?

Visit the [ACR Advocacy Toolkit](#) or contact the [Government Affairs Department](#).

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT NEWS

Adalimumab Policy Amended

Last month, the American College of Rheumatology along with the Arthritis Foundation participated in a conference call with Troy Brennan, MD, CMO of CVS/CareMark regarding their policy requiring patients to use adalimumab as a first agent which would compel patients taking etanercept to switch treatment.

Dr. Brennan informed the ACR and AF that, after careful review, CareMark will update the policy to allow current patients to remain on etanercept if they are doing well. Dr. Brennan indicated that CVS still requires pre-authorizations for all anti-TNFs, but for those who are on etanercept they would only need to apply for a Formulary Exception Process.

The ACR is working with CVS as to when the amendment will be effective. For additional information on this policy or other insurance issue contact Cindy Gutierrez, ACR senior specialist, Insurance and Practice Management at cgutierrez@rheumatology.org or (404) 633-3777, ext 310.

Belimumab Approved for SLE

On March 9, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved belimumab to treat patients with active, autoantibody-positive lupus and receiving standard therapy.

Belimumab is the first drug alternative available for treatment of antibody- positive SLE in over 50 years. This fully human monoclonal antibody is set to identify and inhibit the biological activity of BLYS, otherwise known as B cell activation factor or the TNF family. This new drug will be available for approximately 1.5 Americans who live with lupus.

Cognitive Specialties Coalition Meets with MedPAC

On Wednesday, March 2, ACR President David Borenstein, MD and members of the Cognitive Specialties Coalition engaged in a productive dialogue with Medicare Payment Advisory Commission Executive Director Mark Miller, PhD and staff.

The meeting focused on the impact that CMS' 2010 policy change to eliminate consultation codes is having on cognitive specialty care. Dr. Borenstein offered insight supporting improved patient outcomes at a lower cost through rheumatology provided care. The Coalition will maintain an open dialogue with MedPAC on the value of cognitive specialty care.

The Coalition also met with members of Congress to educate them on the impact CMS' policy change is having on patient access to specialty care. Efforts continue to secure a sponsor to introduce legislation requiring CMS to reinstate consultation codes.

CMS Lab Requisition Rule Withdrawn?

It seems that the requirement for physicians and qualified non-physician practitioner's signature for clinical laboratory tests will be withdrawn by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

See Signature Page 3

ACR Comments on UHC's Abatacept Draft Policy

Last month, United Healthcare requested the American College of Rheumatology to review and comment on their draft abatacept policy. The insurance subcommittee reviewed the policy and concluded that coverage is appropriate for use in most clinical practice settings, based on available clinical and research data. However, the ISC suggested that UHC expand its abatacept policy to include off label use for other conditions as indicated in the ACR's model biologic policy.

ACR Comments on Highmark's Draft MSUS Policy

The American College of Rheumatology was given notice of Highmark's draft policy on musculoskeletal diagnostic ultrasound and ultrasound for guidance of injection and aspiration procedures. The ACR sent a response letter to Highmark on the policy's indications and limitations of use in clinical practice.

Signature continued from page 2

Although CMS has not made an official statement, the American Medical Association reported on March 4 that a notice was received from CMS that they intend to officially rescind the policy which was scheduled for enforcement on April 1.

The new lab signature requirement was included in the "Final Physician Fee Schedule Rule" published in November 2010. CMS' decision to withdraw the policy may have been influenced by the bipartisan letters that were sent from the United States House of Representatives and the Senate requesting that CMS delay the policy as there were serious implications on patient care and business practice.

For additional information contact Antanya Chung at achung@rheumatology.org or (404) 633-3777, ext 818.

ACR Provides Feedback on Meaningful Use Incentive

The ACR joined the AMA and other specialty societies in a letter to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology. The letter provides feedback on the Health Information Technology Policy Committee's proposed set of requirements for stages 2 and 3 of the EHR meaningful use incentive program. [Read the letter here.](#)

ACR Comments on Proposed Changes to Medicare Advantage Plans

The ACR submitted comments to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services about a proposed change to Medicare Advantage plans. The proposed change could restrict access for covered Part B drugs and allow cost-sharing. [Read the letter here.](#)

ACR Supports SGR Reform

The ACR recently signed onto a letter along with the AMA and other medical specialty societies requesting that Congress work together in a bipartisan and bicameral approach to enact legislation that eliminates the SGR and lays the groundwork for broader payment and delivery reforms. [Read the letter here.](#)

PBMs – What is it?

Do you know what is a pharmacy benefit manager or has your office staff felt the pressure of a PBM? One ACR member in San Antonio, TX decides to have a straight talk about Pharmacy Benefit Managers. [Read the article here.](#)

RheumPAC: Advancing Rheumatology on Capitol Hill

The 2010 RheumPAC Annual Report is now online. [Click here to review RheumPAC's activities in 2010.](#) As you will see RheumPAC had a very active year building valuable relationships with congressional candidates and furthering the College's message.

RheumPAC demonstrates to members of Congress that the rheumatology subspecialty is committed to political action, educating policymakers and improving healthcare for our patients. RheumPAC members along with other members of the College plan to meet with members of Congress throughout 2011 to continue dialogue on the role rheumatology plays in care coordination, improved patient outcomes and the importance of cognitive specialties.

With the changes in Congress, having a strong RheumPAC is more important than ever. RheumPAC will continue outreach to returning members of Congress, and the newly elected U.S. Senators and Representatives. If we want to fulfill our mission and advance rheumatology, we must have a strong presence in Washington, D.C.

Make 2011 your year to join RheumPAC. To join or learn more about RheumPAC, visit www.rheumatology.org/rheumpac.

