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A newsletter from:

AfPA Health Policy Council

Physician Legislators Promoting Patient Access

www.allianceforpatientaccess.org

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ABOUT AfPA'S HEALTH POLICY COUNCIL

HPC serves as a physician led non-partisan forum to promote interstate communications between physicians serving in public office. HPC provides for a free exchange of ideas and best policies on issues impacting the practice of medicine. HPC members will join with AfPA's physician leadership to examine issues and promote policies that strengthen the physician-patient relationship while ensuring patient access to appropriate clinical care and approved therapies.

STATES FACE TOUGH DECISIONS ON MEDICAID DOLLARS AND PREMATURE INFANT CARE

This fall states across the country face a delicate dilemma – whether to preserve limited Medicaid funding or protect preterm infants from a severe seasonal respiratory virus. In July, the American Academy of Pediatrics opted against the latter, issuing guidelines that restrict premature infants' access to preventative therapy for respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. Now state Medicaid offices must decide whether to adopt AAP's guidelines as their own, and some health care providers and legislators are speaking out.

Alabama State Representative Jim McClendon, O.D., who chairs the State House Health Committee, says preventative treatment “arms pediatricians” caring for the state's infants. He also views access to treatment as a means of reducing the infant mortality rate, for which Alabama is the second highest in the nation.

“If you're talking dollars,” Rep. McClendon explained, “let's talk about the number of cases where [RSV preventative treatment] prevents readmission to hospitals. We can really *save* money.”

In Georgia, another state battling high infant mortality rates, neonatal nurse practitioner Suzanne Staebler explained, “We pour hundreds of man-hours and thousands of dollars into [premature infants'] care in the NICU. Discharging them from the hospital without...preventative treatment leaves them to face RSV unprotected, with varying degrees of success.”

Palivizumab, the preventative treatment for severe RSV, is administered via monthly injections for the duration of RSV season. November marks the beginning of RSV season for most states.



Rep. Jim McClendon, O.D.

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KS REP. BARBARA BOLLIER FIGHTS FOR MEDICALLY ACCURATE LEGISLATION

Representative Barbara Bollier, M.D.'s approach to health care legislation in the Kansas Statehouse boils down to one pithy, familiar adage: Just the facts.

A board-certified anesthesiologist, Bollier aims for health care bills with precise medical terminology – bills that reflect current, peer-reviewed research. But achieving that goal requires vetting health care legislation.

“Many [health care] bills don't get reviewed through the Health Committee,” Bollier explained, which allows medically inaccurate bills to come up for a vote on the House floor. But the representative maintains that her credibility as a physician legislator depends upon her insistence on medical accuracy. “The specifics make a difference,” she contended.

Bollier is also a stickler for research-based health care legislation. “Physicians understand,” Bollier noted, “that studies need to be peer-reviewed, that publication in certain [medical] journals is significant.” Bollier added that research on a concept “doesn't make it medical fact.”

But even with medically sound laws, Bollier urges fellow legislators to consider whether legislation offers the most appropriate vehicle. “You don't practice medicine in the law,” Bollier explained, adding that standard of care often serves as a better means of establishing best practices for health care providers.

For Bollier, more medically accurate health care legislation requires physician legislators to educate their non-medical colleagues. She envisions the effort as physicians and physician legislators joining together in pursuit of what's best for patients. In the end, Bollier explained, “That's what it's all about.”



Rep. Barbara Bollier, M.D.

JOIN HPC TODAY

As a physician serving in elected office you are invited to join the HPC. There are no membership dues, only a small investment of your time working with fellow physicians towards the promotion of health policies that strengthen the physician-patient relationship while ensuring patient access to appropriate clinical care and approved therapies. To join or learn more about AfPA or the Health Policy Council contact brafferty@allianceforpatientaccess.org or call (202)499-4114.

