

NEWS BRIEFS

Informational Newsletter for Wyoming Hospitals

Volume 41, Number 26

July 1, 2011

WHA Calendar:

WHA Board Meeting Gillette	7/14
WHA PAC Golf Tournament Casper	9/27
WHA Annual Meeting & Convention Casper	9/28-9/29

Other Events:

Hospital Advisory Group Meeting Cheyenne	7/21
Quality Health Care Foundation Jackson, WY	9/7

WHA Responds to Potential Medicare, Medicaid Cuts

A primary, ongoing focus in the U.S. Congress continues to be the battle over reducing the national debt, which currently tops some \$14 trillion.

In order to prevent the country from defaulting on its existing financial obligations, Congress needs to raise the federal debt limit by August 2.

Failure to do so could have catastrophic effects on the American economy, according to some experts.

Legislative proposals to increase the debt limit – and to avoid the predicted economic damage – will likely also become vehicles to significantly reduce the deficit through spending cuts and tax increases.

Given that Medicare and Medicaid comprise more than 20 percent of all federal spending, and, on average, about 55 percent of hospital revenues, the debate over the federal debt limit and deficit reduction could have major implications for the hospital industry, including small and rural hospitals.

While no specifics have been agreed to, the tenor of the current discussions in Washington makes it clear that Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security are targets for major budget reductions. Taken together, these three

programs and other income security programs consume 95 percent of all federal revenues.

A House Republican budget proposal, sponsored by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), calls for a 5 percent cut in federal funding to state Medicaid programs in 2013, 15 percent in 2014, and 35 percent by 2021. The cuts would add up to about \$750 billion over 10 years.

As an alternative to Ryan's proposal, the Obama Administration has proposed its own set of cuts to Medicaid that would shift a significant portion of Medicaid and CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) costs to the states. The plan would replace the current system with a single, lower "blended" rate for each state.

The White House has said that the blended payment plan is intended to make Medicaid simpler and more efficient, thus reducing costs for the government.

But the proposal, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, could prompt states to cut benefits and tighten eligibility requirements for children, people with disabilities, and seniors.

States might also cut reimbursement rates to hospitals and physicians, the report

says, which would make it hard for people to access the health providers they need.

The Coalition to Protect America's Health Care launched a national advertising campaign last week to educate Congress about the implications of further federal funding cuts to hospitals.

The Coalition is a broad-based group of hospitals, businesses, and national, state, and local hospital associations.

The ad campaign illustrates the importance of preventing additional federal funding cuts to ensure that patients continue to receive the vital healthcare services they depend on from hospitals.

The multi-week, multi-million dollar campaign will feature radio, television, and print ads around the country. They can be viewed at www.protecthealthcare.org.

Meanwhile, the Wyoming Hospital Association issued a call to action last week via VoterVoice, encouraging member CEOs to contact Wyoming's Congressional delegation directly and express their concerns.

The WHA also sent a letter to Sen. Enzi, Sen. Barrasso, and Rep. Lummis, offering a statewide perspective on the impact of further cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Don't forget to send us a story about your hospital so we can feature you in our Member Spotlight section!

Wyoming Hospital Association

**2005 Warren Ave.
Cheyenne, WY
82001**

www.wyohospitals.com

307.632.9344

Washakie Medical Center Offers 2nd Camp Healthcare

Recruiting healthcare providers to rural areas is a major focus – and can be a challenge – for small community hospitals.

What better way, then, to capture prospects' interest than to start early and with students with roots in a hospital's service area.

Washakie Medical Center hosted its 2nd annual Camp Healthcare for 7 incoming 8th grade students on June 22, 23, and 24.

Students were selected from an application process which asked them to describe their future interests in a career in healthcare.

The action-packed, three-day camp offered students the unique opportunity to interact with healthcare professionals in activities that simulate patient care.

"We evaluated activities from our camp last year and revised the schedule to include the most hands-on, educational and, of course fun, activities," said Connie Hoffman, public relations officer at Washakie Medical Center.

While they did not provide care to actual patients, they did spend time with the professionals in several departments. Each activity

was carefully planned to appeal to and be understood by young middle school students. The programs included:

- Bacteria analysis of common items such as cell phone, shoe, and keyboard
- Suturing exercise using raw chicken thighs
- Scoping a watermelon, and many others.



Medicare Deadline for FY 2011 EHR Attestation

Sunday marks the last day that eligible hospitals can begin their 90-day reporting period to attest to meaningful use of electronic health records in fiscal year 2011, which ends Sept. 30.

However, hospitals do not have to successfully

attest to meaningful use in FY 2011 to benefit fully from the Medicare EHR incentive program.

Critical access hospitals must attest in FY 2012 to benefit fully, while inpatient prospective payment system hospitals can begin attesting in FY 2013.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, only \$190 million in incentives have been distributed by Medicare and Medicaid since January.

For more on the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs, visit www.aha.org/aha/issues/HIT/mu.

ACA Creates Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan

A new program created by the Affordable Care Act may help consumers who have been turned down for insurance coverage because of a pre-existing condition.

The Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan is a transitional program for children and adults in all 50 states and the District of Columbia who have been locked out of the health insurance market. In 2014, all Americans, regardless of their health sta-

tus, will have access to affordable insurance.

The program will provide coverage for a wide range of services, such as physicians' services, hospital care, and prescription drugs. Enrollees will pay a monthly premium, a deductible, and some cost-sharing expenses.

To qualify, applicants must be citizens of the United States or residing here legally, have been uninsured for at least six months be-

fore applying, and have a pre-existing condition or have been denied insurance coverage because of their health condition.

Each state may use different methods to determine the existence of pre-existing conditions and whether applicants have been denied health coverage. For more information, visit www.pcip.gov.