DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY FORUM

PA Budget and Health Care Reform

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The need to decrease costs while increasing health care coverage is a dominant theme in Pennsylvania. Barbara Holland, Deputy General Counsel representing the Governor's Office on Health Care Reform, described the numerous programmatic updates and legislative challenges affecting the future of healthcare in Pennsylvania.

MCARE (Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error) Fund abatement is part of the Governor's Medical Malpractice Reform Proposal and the Health Care Provider Retention Account. It is designed to impact insurance affordability and availability, and patient safety by providing excess limits of malpractice coverage to health care providers, with 100% abatement to certain specialty providers and 50% for all other physicians.

Scope of Practice Reforms and the elimination of practice barriers continue to be on the forefront of proposed change. For example, there is much discussion regarding reforms for Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNPs). A recent proposal would have given CRNPs additional practice authority. However, CRNPs are currently not allowed to participate in MCARE and, if they are employed, do not have to maintain separate coverage. Further clarification will be necessary before reforms can be implemented. Scope of Practice bills for pharmacists and physician's assistants (PAs) are being considered.

The Governor's office is particularly concerned with the high rate of health care-associated infections (HAIs) and medical errors in Pennsylvania and has set forth proposals that aim to significantly impact patient safety, including: electronic surveillance of HAIs; reporting of HAIs for all patients in the entire facility; reporting requirements for nursing homes; and quality improvement payments.

Pennsylvanians also have a high rate of avoidable chronic disease hospitalizations that resulted in significant hospital charges. Governor Rendell recently established a Chronic Care Commission to develop and implement a management model of chronic care to increase quality outcomes and cost-effective treatments.

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