Grassley Digs Into Biederman
Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) has tenacious go-getting goads to conflict of interest in the medical field, focusing closely on psychiatry. In the latest volley in his investigation into Dr. Joseph Biederman of Harvard University, Sen. Grassley said he was provided documents as part of ongoing litigation that apparently do not demonstrate that Dr. Biederman was acting in tandem with Johnson & Johnson to promote Concerta and other psychopharmacologica for off-label uses. Sen. Grassley sent a 63-page missive to the presidents of Harvard and the Massachusetts General Hospital outlining numerous apparent conflicts, including that Dr. Biederman was receiving $500,000 in grant money from the National Institutes of Health while he was running JFK’s Center for Pediatric Psychopharmacology Research. Separately, in a letter to the New Jersey judge overseeing the litigation that New Jersey’s attorneys hope to use, the Biederman’s attorneys are seeking an order to prevent plaintiffs from using the content of his deposition. Among other things in that deposition, when asked what rank followed full professor at Harvard, Dr. Biederman answered “God.”

Dementias Three Times as Costly
The latest report on Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias from the Alzheimer’s Association finds that Medicare pays out three times as much for beneficiaries with brain diseases, averaging $15,000 annually, compared with about $5,000 for those with no dementias. The 2009 report also found that 5.3 million Americans are living with AD. The organization expects 500,000 new cases a year in 2010, and a million per year by 2050. From 2000 to 2005, deaths from AD rose 47%, whereas deaths from other major diseases declined. The disease is also taking a toll on family members, who provide care for 70% of those with Alzheimer’s. More states are querying caregivers about the impact. In Washington state, 48% of caregivers said stress was their greatest difficulty.

Physicians Postponing Retirement
Fewer physicians left group practices in 2008 than in 2007, and most group practice leaders believe that this change reflects more physicians’ postponement of retirement because of reimbursement troubles. The American Medical Group Association’s annual survey of 200 members about a 6% turnover of group practice physicians in 2008, compared with nearly 7% in 2007. The top reasons cited for leaving a group included poor fit with one’s practice and the need to relocate to be closer to family. Flexibility can keep physicians in a practice, according to respondents, nearly half of whom said that part-time options enhanced the practice. Physicians either to stay while meeting personal needs, or to delay retirement.

—Alicia Altu