POLICY & PRACTICE
WANT MORE HEALTH REFORM NEWS? SUBSCRIBE TO OUR PODCAST – SEARCH “POLICY & PRACTICE” IN THE ITUNES STORE

BY HEIDI SPLETE

A federal judge in Washington dismissed a lawsuit that sought to block federal funding for medical studies using human embryonic stem cells. A previous court opinion filed in 1999 concluded that human embryos were created or destroyed during the process of creating the cell. Researchers were supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Institutes of Health. The survey indicated that ob.gyns. aged 35 and younger were the most likely to perform abortions (22%), followed by doctors aged 56-65 years (15%). Physicians were also more likely to perform abortions if they lived in the Northeast, practiced in an urban area, and did not have strong religious beliefs, according to the survey, which was conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago and Duke University in Durham, N.C. The researchers did not ask whether those ob.gyns. who do not perform abortions provide referrals for abortion. The researchers were supported by grants from the Greenwall Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health.

Federal Agencies Set Stage For State Health Exchanges

From a teleconference sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services

Federal officials are laying the groundwork for the launch of state-based health insurance exchanges in 2014, handing out $185 million in “establishment” grants to 13 states, and distributing tools to 45 states, designing tools to determine eligibility to buy insurance, and proposing details on how the refundable premium tax credits will work. The Health and Human Services department announced during a teleconference Aug. 12 that it is awarding $185 million in “establishment” grants to 13 states and the District of Columbia to help them build their insurance exchanges. These grants follow planning grants awarded last year by HHS. More than half of the states have already taken some action to begin building their exchanges, according to HHS. Another proposal from HHS attempts to simplify the process for determining eligibility in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program and coordinate these processes with the insurance exchanges, so that individuals can move from Medicaid to another health plan without losing coverage.

Finally, the Treasury Department issued a proposed regulation that explains how individuals and families can receive premium tax credits for purchasing health insurance. Under the Affordable Care Act, taxpayers with incomes between 100% and 400% of the federal poverty level will be eligible for premium tax credits if they purchase insurance through the exchange for themselves or a family member. The tax credits are paid in advance to the health plan to reduce the individual’s monthly premium.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

Judge OKs Federal Funding for Embryonic Stem Cell Research

BY HEIDI SPLETE

Few Ob.Gyns. Perform Abortions

While nearly all ob.gyns. see patients seeking abortions, only about 14% report performing abortions themselves, according to a new survey. The self-ad- ministered survey of more than 1,000 practicing ob.gyns. across the United States showed that female physicians were more likely to perform abortions than were their male counterparts, with 19% of women providing the procedure compared with 11% of men. The findings were published in the September issue of Obstetrics & Gynecology (2011;118:609-14). Age was also a factor. The survey indicated that ob.gyns. aged 35 and younger were the most likely to perform abortions (22%), followed by doctors aged 56-65 years (15%). Physicians were also more likely to perform abortions if they lived in the Northeast, practiced in an urban area, and did not have strong religious beliefs, according to the survey, which was conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago and Duke University in Durham, N.C. The researchers did not ask whether those ob.gyns. who do not perform abortions provide referrals for abortion. The researchers were supported by grants from the Greenwall Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health.

Pregnancy Rate Disparities ‘Troubling’

The rate of unintended pregnancies among poor women in the United States is rising dramatically, even as nationally that figure remains about the same. An analysis of data from the Guttmacher Institute found that between 2001 and 2006, the unintended pregnancy rate nationally rose from 50 per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years to 52 per 1,000 women. But among women below the federal poverty line, the rate of unintended pregnancies actually dropped among higher-income women. For women whose incomes were at or above 200% of federal poverty, the rate fell from 28 to 24 per 1,000 women during that period. The analysts at the Guttmacher Institute also found that poor women tended to have higher rates of unintended pregnancies regardless of their education, race and ethnicity, marital status, or age. “The growing disparity in unplanned pregnancy rates between poor and higher-income women – which reflects persistent, similar disparities across a range of health and social indicators – is deeply troubling,” Sharon Camp, president and CEO of the Guttmacher Institute, said in a statement. Addressing them requires not only improved access to reproductive health care, but also looking to broader social and economic inequalities.” The Guttmacher Institute researchers relied on federal govern- ment data such as the National Survey of Family Growth, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s abortion surveillance figures, and their own data on abortion in putting together the analysis.

SF Circumcisions Remain Legal

A well-publicized effort to ban male circumcision in San Francisco was blocked by the courts this summer. Opponents of circumcision had collected enough signatures to place a proposed ban of the procedure on the city’s November ballot. If successful, the measure would have prohibited the circumcision of boys under age 18 unless it was deemed medically necessary. The referendum did not include an exception based on religious beliefs. But in late July, San Francisco Superior Court Judge Loretta M. Giorgi tossed out the ballot measure, saying that the regulation of medical procedures can be done only by the state, not the city.

Know the Law on Expedited Partner Tx

Officials at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists are urging ob.gyns. who work in states where the prescription of antibiotics to the male sex partners of female patients with a sexually transmitted infection is prohibited to work with the law. “We are pleased with the President and Deputy Administration’s” statement that explains how individuals and families can move from Medicaid to seek financial assistance. The proposed rule also explains the standards for those who employ employers to participate in the exchange.

Another proposal from HHS attempts to simplify the process for determining eligibility in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program and coordinate these processes with the insurance exchanges, so that individuals can move from Medicaid to another health plan without losing coverage.

Finally, the Treasury Department issued a proposed regulation that explains how individuals and families can receive premium tax credits for purchasing health insurance. Under the Affordable Care Act, taxpayers with incomes between 100% and 400% of the federal poverty level will be eligible for premium tax credits if they purchase insurance through the exchange for themselves or a family member. The tax credits are paid in advance to the health plan to reduce the individual’s monthly premium.

—Mary Ellen Schneider