The project will make various data sets public so that state and local governments, researchers, and others can use them to analyze public health trends and create applications.

County-level data on Medicare prevalence by disease, quality, costs, and service utilization as part of HHS's Community Health Data Initiative.

As part of the overall Open Government initiative, the FDA also launched a new dashboard, which will fully implement, will allow the public to track some 300 performance measures and 80 key projects across more than 90 FDA program offices on an ongoing basis, Dr. Joshua Sharfstein, FDA principal deputy commissioner, said during the webcast.

The public will be able to use the dashboard, located at www.fda.gov/fda/track, to “see the progress that each office is making toward its goals,” he said.

FDA Proposes New Ad Rules

The Food and Drug Administration wants manufacturers to detail more of the contraindications and potential side effects of drugs in radio and television ads targeting consumers, under new regulations.

The proposed rule would require that an ad’s major statement on side effects and contraindications “be presented in a clear, conspicuous, and neutral manner.” The new rule would require manufacturers to present the information in both the audio and visual components of a video ad and make sure that it isn’t overshadowed by other parts of either type of ad.

The FDA will accept comments on the proposed rule until June 28.

Restaurants Must Post Calories

As part of the newly approved health care reform law, chain restaurants will be required to post the calorie content for their standard menu items along with nutritional information on the menu and calorie intake from the Department of Agriculture.

The provision in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law last month by President Obama, will affect restaurateurs and other retail food establishments with 20 or more locations and the same menu items at each location.

Restaurants also will need to have additional nutrition information, such as fat and sodium content, available for their menu items. Vending operators with more than 20 machines will be required to post calorie information on their food items. The law requires the FDA to issue proposed regulations by next March.

State Medical Board Actions Up

State medical boards took 5,721 actions against physicians in 2009, an increase of 342, or more than 6%, over 2008, according to a report from the Federation of State Medical Boards.

Meanwhile, an analysis of the advocacy group Public Citizen found that the rate of serious disciplinary actions rose slightly in 2009 but still sits about 18% lower than the peak rate of 2004. Minnesota ranked last in disciplining physicians, Public Citizen said, and Maryland, South Carolina, and South Dakota were tied for second. Wisconsin also consistently ranks among the bottom 10.

Broadband Plan Adds Health Goals

As part of the Obama administration’s new National Broadband Plan to extend fast Internet service nationwide, the Federal Communications Commission said it wants to revamp the Rural Health Care Program to ensure that all health care providers have access to broadband.

The broadband plan, which contains seven specific recommendations on health care, would redistribute $400 million per year in the Rural Health Care Program to help health care providers purchase broadband services and expand broadband to more institutions.

In addition, the new plan calls for states and other regulators to revise licensing, privileging, and credentialing standards to enable physicians to practice medicine remotely and across state lines.

Governor Signs Meth Law

Alabama Gov. Bob Riley (R) has signed a law intended to help law enforcement officials quickly track.exe cessive purchases of pseudoephedrine, the chief ingredient used in the manufacture of methamphetamine. The law creates a new electronic database in an effort to modernize logs that already are kept on paper, making it possible to instantly track excessive purchases of pseudoephedrine. Every pharmacy or retailer selling ephedrine or pseudoephedrine products will be required to enter the purchaser’s identifying information into an electronic database. The database then will notify the seller if the purchaser has exceeded the daily or monthly limit for such purchases.

Law enforcement authorities also will have access to the database. “Our local law enforcement agencies tell us that in some cases, the patient plays a role in almost every crime,” Gov. Riley said in a statement.

—Jane Anderson

Personal Health Record Use Still Low, but Growing Fast

While the use of personal health records is gaining popularity, only 1 in 14 Americans report having used one, according to a survey of 1,849 patients.

Among the reasons cited by those who do not use a PHR were concerns over the data privacy, the perception that they don’t need such a tool, and fears that PHRs might cost too much or take up too much time, according to Sam Karp, vice president of programs for CHCF.

Of those who reported PHR use, 26% reported using one sponsored by their health care provider while 51% reported using one provided by their insurer.

While PHRs users tend to be young, highly educated white men with relatively high incomes, patients with chronic illnesses and those with lower-than-average income and educations were more likely to report benefiting from using a PHR, according to the survey results.

For example, 55% of respondents without a college degree reported that after using a PHR, they asked their provider questions they would not have asked. Also, 58% of users with incomes of less than $50,000 said that they felt more connected to their doctors as a result of using a PHR. Further, 40% of PHR-using respondents with two or more chronic conditions reported that they had taken steps to improve their health, the researchers said.

In addition to assisting patients in managing their health, PHRs can also serve as safety tools, said Dr. Kate Christensen, medical director, Internet services group for Kaiser Permanente. Kaiser, which runs a PHR serving 3 million patients, has found that patients use it to check their medical data and e-mail providers to report errors.

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