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Today's News Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Avoidable Readmissions

New York had slot No. 50—only Louisiana performed worse—in a national ranking of avoidable hospital use and its costs. The Commonwealth Fund's recent State Scorecard on Health System Performance assessed states' performance relative to 38 indicators of access, quality, costs and health outcomes. New York's abysmal score in that category did not surprise such primary care advocates as the American College of Physicians. The root cause, says Linda Lambert, executive director of the New York chapter, is poor transitioning of care. The role of hospitalists has been the topic of three recent meetings of a New York task force. "We need to be able to have individuals followed more closely after discharge to get the treatment they need to avoid readmissions," she says. The ranking is at www.commonwealthfund.org.

Nonprofit Grants

The New York State Health Foundation used its latest round of funding, \$2 million, on 10 grants that address nonprofits' financial challenges. Among the downstate grant recipients, Brownsville Community Development Corp. received \$249,800 to acquire primary care clinics from Long Island College Hospital. Planned Parenthood of NYC got \$350,500 to merge its clinical services, financial systems, fundraising, human resources and board governance with Planned Parenthood of Nassau County. And the Sunset Park Health Council will use its \$200,000 to acquire 12 New York City Oral Health Program dental clinics that faced closure due to city budget cuts.

Conference for Nurses

The New York State Nurses Association organized a national legislative conference for nurses, which it bills as the first ever such event. The keynote speaker will be Suzanne Gordon, an author and lecturer on nursing issues. The conference is called "Finding Our Voice: Legislative Advocacy for Nurses" and will be held Nov. 9-11 in Orlando, Fla. For information, visit www.nysna.org.

Fight over FICA means millions for NY hospitals

New York state hospitals may be eligible to get million of dollars in IRS refunds of taxes they paid on medical residents' stipends. The basis of the claims is a student exemption from the tax, both for medical residents and for their hospital employers. Large teaching hospitals in New York City could easily be able to reclaim \$10 million each in refundable Federal Insurance Contributions Act taxes, according to law firm McDermott Will & Emery. The FICA refund claims are for the period 1994 to the present.

The law firm represented four of the five teaching hospitals that successfully challenged the IRS in circuit courts. Its two recent wins in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit were for Albany Medical Center and Memorial Sloan-Kettering. Of the past 15 decisions in federal courts, 12 favored the teaching hospitals. "The Second Circuit cases should help us shake loose settlements for the taxpayers" located in the district, which includes New York, notes David Ivill, who works on the cases at MWE with partner Thomas Sykes.

The IRS has refused to take any administrative action on the claims —refusing to allow, disallow or settle them—which means hospitals have to go to court to get their money.

At A Glance

SKELETONS: Mount Sinai Hospital is expecting a record turnout of nearly 200 for an annual program that offers training on musculoskeletal issues. The goals: how to manage noncomplex cases, and when to call in a specialist. Mount Sinai, of course, stands to benefit from those referrals. "Orthopedics for the Primary Care Provider" is set for Oct. 30-31, under the direction of Andrew Hecht, co-chief of spine surgery at Mount Sinai. It will provide an overview of the most common disorders encountered in an outpatient setting. Workshops will cover musculoskeletal examination, injection techniques, splinting methods and imaging interpretation. The tuition is \$350 for non-Mount Sinai doctors, \$100 for Mount Sinai doctors, and \$50 for nurses, residents and fellows. To register, call (212) 731-7950.

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