AMA Combats Prescription Drug Abuse Through Policy & Legislation

By Stacy Sellek

During the recent AMA Interim Meeting, physicians adopted four proposals dealing with drug availability, abuse, and pain management. The first policy gives a contemporary review of national drug control policy and calls for a variety of changes, including developing community-based prevention programs for at-risk youth and increasing the accessibility of treatment programs for substance use disorders.

A second policy aims to address opioid-associated overdoses and deaths. It directs the AMA to develop a set of best practices to inform clinical use of these drugs in managing persistent pain. It also calls for the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention to collect more robust data on unintentional opioid poisonings and deaths to develop appropriate solutions for preventing such incidences.

Another policy asks the Joint Commission to re-evaluate its accreditation standard for pain management; that standard should improve pain management practices.

The fourth policy requires the AMA Council on Science and Public Health to give a report evaluating the state of the nation’s drug shortage crisis at each AMA policymaking meeting.

Getting Federal Funding

While the AMA Interim Meeting was taking place, Steven J. Stack, MD, immediate past chair of the AMA Board of Trustees, testified in Washington, DC, before the House Committee on Energy & Commerce’s Subcommittee on Health to push for passage and full funding of a reauthorization bill that would help physicians combat prescription drug abuse while ensuring that patients in pain are relieved of their suffering.

Doctor Stack said that “appropriations to fully fund, modernize, and optimize prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) have not kept pace with the escalation in abuse and diversion.”

His testimony came as the House considers the “National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting Reauthorization Act of 2013” (NASPER). PDMPs were designed to give physicians information about controlled substance prescriptions patients have obtained and filled from other prescribers.

However, Doctor Stack also told the subcommittee that “the majority of PDMPs still are not real-time, interoperable, or available at the point-of-care as a regular part of physician workflow.” Reauthorization and full federal funding of NASPER would help modernize and make PDMPs fully interoperable, he added.

“To be helpful, it is essential that PDMPs are easy to use and provide reliable information to guide sound clinical decisions,” Doctor Stack said. “When prescription drug monitoring programs support clinical decision-making, the efficacy is remarkable.”

Doctor Stack also cited an Ohio pilot project that placed PDMPs in emergency departments and found that 41 percent of prescribers given reliable PDMP data altered their prescribing decisions. “Accurate PDMP data can directly inform sound clinical decisions, thereby reducing diversion and abuse while still ensuring that patients receive the care they need,” he explained.

AMA Resources

A national sense of urgency to combat diversion and drug abuse has increased, and the AMA continues to work on a number of fronts to attack the problem while at the same time preserving access to medically necessary treatment for pain.

The AMA offers a host of resources to help physicians better understand trends in unintentional prescription opioid overdoses and the public health response, including a free webinar. Visit www.ama-assn.org (search “Combating Prescription Drug Abuse and Diversion”).

MSMS Efforts & Resources

- MSMS received a block grant from CO*RE (Collaborative for REMS Education) to offer courses at the 2013 ASM, as well as an upcoming webinar about pain management.
- With direction from the House of Delegates this year, MSMS reintroduced the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Committee, which is working on the overuse of opioids, what physicians can do to provide alternatives and education on the use of opioids, and how to help serve those patients who are addicted to opioids.
- Michigan Medicine July/August 2013 issue – Opioid Use on the Rise: Is the Pen Mightier Than the Alternatives When It Comes to Chronic Pain Management? (www.msms.org/michiganmedicine)
- Michigan Medicine September/October 2013 issue – Opioid Abuse Puts Physicians Between a Rock and a Hard Place (www.msms.org/michiganmedicine)