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Society Voices Concern Over New ACCME Standards and NIH Open Access Proposal at AMA House of Delegates Meeting

The American Medical Association (AMA) held its semi-annual House of Delegates (HOD) meeting in Atlanta, GA, December 3 – December 7, 2004. The HOD is the principle policy-making body of the AMA where Association members vote on policy initiatives that will be carried out by the organization. The Endocrine Society has a seat in the AMA HOD, which provides clinical endocrinologists with a voice in the most powerful advocacy group for America's physicians.

During this year's Interim meeting, The Endocrine Society sought to raise awareness of two issues that could have deleterious effects on the Society: The recently released Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) New Standards of Conduct and The National Institutes of Health's Public Access Proposal.

The Endocrine Society has been actively involved in the deliberative process of the ACCME while it has been considering new standards of commercial support. The Society provided comments to ACCME during its open comment period and identified problems and concerns with the proposed plan at that time. Despite the Society's comments, and those of a significant number of CME providers, the final iteration of the standards includes provisions that would make compliance difficult for the Society. Standard 2 is particularly ominous.

The requirement in Standard 2 provides that everyone involved with CME programs will need to disclose conflicts of interests. This includes staff, planning committee members, faculty, authors, program reviewers, abstract reviewers, vendors, etc. In addition, the standard would also force the Society to identify and resolve all conflicts prior to educational meetings. So, in addition to reviewing and identifying conflicts the Society would be responsible for resolving those conflicts.

The AMA, which holds two seats on the ACCME board, voted in favor of the new standards despite serious concerns over some of the questionable provisions. The Endocrine Society supported a resolution sponsored by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE), which asked the AMA to reconsider its approval of the new standards and push for new standards that were less onerous on smaller societies. The House of Delegates agreed with our position that the AMA should work closely with ACCME on the implementation of these standards, and make specific efforts to ensure workable options for resolving conflict of interest and bias issues.

The second issue that The Endocrine Society sought AMA support for was the NIH's public access to information proposal. As reported earlier, NIH has announced a proposal that would make Society-published material that is funded by NIH available free to the public in six months. Currently, the Society makes its content available after twelve months, and manuscripts are available free upon acceptance. NIH has not consulted with the publishing community about this proposal, which could result in numerous unintended negative consequences

At the HOD meeting, The Endocrine Society was supportive of a resolution sponsored by The American Society of Hematology and American College of Rheumatology that asked the AMA to oppose the NIH's public access proposal until the NIH answers unknown questions and concerns regarding its proposal. The House of Delegates was unable to come to a consensus over the resolution and referred it to the AMA Board of Trustees for a decision. The Endocrine Society will continue to work with the AMA and NIH to push for a policy that is conducive to all stakeholders who care about public access.

The Society also helped promote the candidacy of two Society members who are running for leadership roles within the AMA. Dr. Myron Genel, who is running for AMA Board of Trustees, and Dr. Melissa Thomas, who is running for reelection to the AMA's Council on Medical Education. The election for these positions will be held at the AMA's Annual Meeting this June in Chicago.

Science Agencies Compete for Funding Under One Appropriations Subcommittee

A proposal from House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) would require the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA all compete for funding from the same appropriations subcommittee.

DeLay's proposal would reduce the number of appropriations subcommittees from 13 to 10, removing NASA from the Housing and Urban Development, VA, and Independent Agencies Subcommittee and placing similarly functioning agencies together.

According to *Washington Fax* (December 10, 2004), views regarding the reorganization are mixed among the Senate and House. Some staffers predict that if the House takes the lead on this proposal then the Senate would possibly accept the proposal with some modification. However, a former House staffer believed that the House appropriations subcommittee chairs would not agree with DeLay's plan because it would mean that three chairmen would have to give up power bases.

Sources say support for the DeLay proposal will be a key interview question, if not a full-blown litmus test during the Jan. 4 interviews for the next House Appropriations Committee chairman. The House Republican Steering Committee reportedly will select the new chair by vote on Jan. 5. The candidates are Reps. Ralph Regula (R-Ohio), Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) and Hal Rogers (R-Ky). The current House Appropriations Chair, C. W. "Bill" Young (R-Fla.), is vacating the chairmanship because of term limits.

CMS to Improve Physician Communication Efforts

A representative from The Endocrine Society staff recently met with staff from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and other specialty societies to learn about a new initiative that will require Medicare contractors (carriers and fiscal intermediaries) to improve their provider communications programs. CMS staffer Shana Olshan informed participants that the initiative, which is detailed in a recent CMS transmittal, will require contractors to implement a customer service program that will educate and train fee-for-service Medicare providers. Contractors will also be required to make information tools available to providers to assist them in Medicare program operations, policy, and billing procedures.

Ms. Olshan told meeting participants that the initiative is designed to improve accuracy, completeness, consistency, and timeliness by ensuring that staff with the appropriate levels of expertise addresses provider issues.

According to Transmittal 113: Implementation of Section 921 of the Medicare Modernization Action (MMA)—Provider Customer Service Program, “Providers shall be able to have their questions answered accurately, consistently, and timely through various communication channels offered at both the national and local levels. At times providers may require special technical assistance in areas such as billing and coding. To meet these goals Medicare contractors are required to implement a customer service program designed to meet provider information and educational needs.”

Ms. Olshan emphasized that providers who call CMS seeking advice on what codes to use for certain services will not find their all answers through the agency. “CMS cannot tell providers what codes are most appropriate for most services. This is the job of the AMA, who developed the CPT codes,” said Olshan. “What CMS can do is assist providers by informing about the policies behind the codes.”

Following Ms. Olshan’s presentation, CMS Program Integrity staff reported that they will soon initiate a monthly “Ask the Contractor” conference call program. Similar to CMS’s Open Door Forum conference calls, these calls will take place at the Medicare carrier level with regional officers required to be invited to each one. These calls will give providers an opportunity to get first-hand knowledge of carrier local policies.

With this, CMS asked the specialty societies to please assist them during the transition to the new program by educating providers ourselves on matters of coding and reimbursement. Follow updates of this story in future issues of *Endocrine Insider*.

Society Supports Two FASEB Programs in 2005

In an effort to enhance scientists’ exposure to, and participation in, state of the art research, The Endocrine Society recently joined forces with the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) by co-sponsoring four of FASEB’s Summer Research Conferences and two issues of its *Breakthroughs in Bioscience* series.

The FASEB Summer Research Conferences, which began in 1982, are a continuing series of inter-disciplinary exchanges that have become recognized as a valuable complement to FASEB’s other meetings. The conferences emphasize cutting edge research, with prominent

scientists in each field making presentations to attendees who themselves are heavily engaged in research or are in ancillary fields where an accurate understanding of allied scientific advances is important.

Almost 700 scientists are expected to attend the four conferences. Society membership information and journals will be distributed at each conference. Topics chosen for the Society's co-sponsorship are Nuclear Structure & Cancer; Nutrient Control of Gene Expression & Signaling; Receptor & Signal Transduction; and Glucose Transporter Biology.

Breakthroughs in Bioscience is a series of illustrated essays that explain recent breakthroughs in biomedical research and how they are important to society. The Society's sponsorship of two of these FASEB-produced issues will result in two endocrinology-focused issues that may be utilized to educate Congress and the general public about the benefits of fundamental biomedical research. Society members will serve as authors and advisors to these issues, which are expected to be completed near the end of next year.

FASEB currently has 17 topics published in *Breakthroughs in Bioscience*.

NIH Announces a New Investigators Web site

Recently the NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER) announced the posting of a new Web site that targets new clinical and basic investigators. According to NIH the site provides historical information and describes current policies. It also offers helpful hints and resources that might be useful in constructing a first application for NIH support. The link for the website is: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/new_investigators/index.htm

NSF's New Focus on Success

The Endocrine Society recently learned that National Science Foundation (NSF) Director Arden Bement stated that the NSF is planning to increase the number of meritorious proposals it funds. NSF provides approximately 20% of federal support to academic institutions for basic research. In FY 2004, the average grant from NSF was for \$140,000 over an average of three years.

In the FY 2005 omnibus funding bill NSF received \$5.473 billion, compared with last year's appropriation of \$5.578 billion. In order to meet funding constraints, Bement said that, "The agency would seek an appropriate balance between solicited and unsolicited research and between small groups and research centers." He will place a priority in "building a competent [science, technology, engineering and math] workforce." One of his main messages will be, "when you invest in NSF, you support not only research but education of the next generation of mathematicians, computer scientists, biologists, engineers and others."

"Researchers and students should not be discouraged by negative funding prospects," said Bement. "I would tell them their passion will be fulfilled even with a constrained fiscal environment." Another priority for Bement is to decrease U.S. dependence on foreign postdocs manning U.S. laboratories. In order to achieve this, Bement has proposed building STEM education therefore increasing the number of U.S. S&T career tracks. Bement notes

that today's interdisciplinary researchers will become tomorrow's acknowledged disciplines but at the moment the new generation is focusing on "the white spaces between disciplines."

"The U.S. must place a new emphasis on competitiveness both in the global market and in technological development," Bement said. "Developing countries are investing in infrastructure and education to the extent that it won't be long before they don't need the U.S. graduate education system to build their S&T workforce."

Source: December 14, 2004, Washington Fax

DHHS Secretary Makes Science a Priority

Former Utah Governor and President Bush's nominee for Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Michael Leavitt, vowed that science and technology will not be pursued at the expense of values during his term.

During a December 13 White House press conference, Leavitt said, "I'm persuaded that we can use technology and innovation to meet our most noble aspirations and not compromise our other values that we hold so dear."

Effective February 4, 2005, current DHHS Secretary, Tommy Thompson, will officially resign from his position allowing Leavitt to carry-out his proposed priorities. Leavitt has also vowed to implement the Medicare prescription drug program in 2006, which would reduce the cost of healthcare. Leavitt's confirmation will be considered by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the Senate Committee on Finance.

Mr. Leavitt was a three-term governor of Utah. He received his bachelor's in economics and business from Southern Utah University and is currently the Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

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