

Dear all:

Please allow this to be an update of MAG activities over the last few weeks. As always, my previous updates can be found at <http://www.mag.org/resources/executive-directors-message>.

### **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia “ER Policy”**

On July 1, BCBS’ new “emergency room” policy calling for a retrospective review to determine whether BCBS would pay for claims they deemed “non-emergent” went into effect. MAG, the Georgia College of Emergency Physicians and various other specialties have been very vocal as to our opposition to the new “ER policy.” This policy has gained national attention. The American Medical Association sent a letter to Anthem calling for Anthem to rescind the policy. The AMA letter can be found at [http://www.mag.org/news/articles/ama\\_anthem\\_er](http://www.mag.org/news/articles/ama_anthem_er).

BCBS did an interview with WABE this week, which can be found at <http://news.wabe.org/post/blue-cross-blue-shield-ga-president-discusses-new-er-policy>. BCBS’ interview was a rebuttal to the interview MAG did with WABE in June that can be found at <http://news.wabe.org/post/medical-association-reacts-blue-cross-blue-shield-ga-er-policy>.

The interview is worth a listen. We have concerns on a number of the statements made in the rebuttal. For example, BCBS has failed to provide the data that we have requested. BCBS has taken the position that the physicians already have the data on the emergency room visits that may be subject to this new policy, which includes the diagnostic codes. Unless the physicians have this information in the aggregate, we are unclear as to how you would have this information. **If you happen to have this information, I would ask that you email me directly.** Also, while the new policy only applies to the health insurance exchange patients, we are unclear if this policy will expand to other lines of insurance in the future.

Please note that BCBS’ health insurance exchange policies just applied for an average premium increase of forty (40%) percent on its health insurance exchange line of business. <http://www.georgiahealthnews.com/2017/07/blue-cross-insurers-seeking-big-premium-hikes/>.

We will continue to express our opposition to BCBS on their ER policy as it directly impacts patient safety.

### **The Senate Health Care Bill (Revised Version of the Better Care Reconciliation Act)**

The Senate has released a modified version of the BCRA. We are in the process of reviewing the bill. An early review of the information available raises concerns on the “Cruz” amendment and weakening on the current law that requires certain coverage by the health insurance companies. Additionally, we are concerned about the bill’s impact on the Medicaid program. We will provide more analysis as the Congressional Budget Office reviews the proposal. Please follow our website on Breaking News for up to the minute analysis.

### **Opioid Abuse and Richmond County Medical Society**

RCMS leadership (Craig Kerins, MD, Donnie Dunagan, MD, Adair Blackwood, MD and Dan Walton) are doing a spectacular job addressing the opioid abuse epidemic. Here is report we received from RCMS on their efforts to reduce opioids in their community:

The drug drop box unveiling went very well. Donnie Dunagan, our current President, said a few words, followed by Dr Blackwood and myself. The medical director of the health department (who is a great fellow) presented a few excellent thoughts. A representative of the Sheriff's department was also present. ABC News was there, with a reporter, and with a camera. They filmed the event, and promised it would be on their evening news tonight at 6PM. I answered a few questions (in front of the camera) afterwards. Tom Corwin, the medical editor of the Chronicle was also there, with a photographer. It is a sure shot we will have an article and pictures in the paper tomorrow.

The drugs are pouring into the box, and they may have to empty it daily!

Then we went over to the Richmond County Board of Education. The team was Dan Walton, Stacie McGee (Dan's assistant), Dr. Blackwood, Ben Wilson (medical student), Jose Puertes (medical student), and me. We were all introduced to the Board, and Adair Blackwood gave some introductory comments with his usual eloquence. Then Jose got up, and literally blew their socks off. They let him go on with no interruptions. It is pretty riveting. They all admitted to being shocked, and without any significant discussion unanimously voted to "embed" (their word, not mine) his talk into the public school curriculum. The medical society got huge credits (not entirely deserved) for bringing this presentation to them. Jose left us somewhat shocked himself at how easy it all was, and directed towards recruiting more med students to make presentations, as there will be many.

Augusta has had extensive coverage with the local stations, which can be found at <http://www.wrdw.com/video?vid=433797083> and <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/2017-07-11/want-get-rid-your-old-prescription-drugs-dropbox-offers-solution-augusta>.

### **Department of Public Health**

Congratulations to Brenda Fitzgerald, MD, longtime commissioner for the Department of Public Health, who was named Director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dr. Fitzgerald has been fantastic to work with in her role with DPH and we look forward to many great achievements out of the CDC. More information can be found at <http://www.mag.org/news/article/Media-report-Trump-administration-names-Georgia-health-official-as-new-CDC-director>.

Congratulations to Pat O'Neal, MD who was named by Governor Nathan Deal as the interim commissioner for the Department of Public Health. Dr. O'Neal has worked with MAG for a longtime focusing on issues related to our Medical Reserve Corps, zika virus and other public health issues. We are excited to continue the relationship with Dr. O'Neal. More information can be found at <http://www.mag.org/news/article/Gov-Deal-names-interim-DPH-commissioner>.

### **Electronic Health Records Survey**

MAG is conducting a survey on electronic health records. Please take a moment and provide feedback on your experiences with electronic health records - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CGB3D93>

### **Council on Legislation**

The Council on Legislation will begin meeting over the next few months to discuss the 2018 General Assembly and legislative priorities. If you would like to submit any proposals for the COL to consider, please contact Derek Norton at [dnorton@mag.org](mailto:dnorton@mag.org).

As always, if you should need anything, please do not hesitate to call.

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