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### **Restrictive Imaging Bill Resurfaces in Massachusetts**

Cardiologists in Massachusetts are preparing to fend off a radiology-supported bill that limits physicians' ability to refer patients to non-hospital settings for imaging services. Similar to an amendment that nearly passed the Massachusetts legislature last year, the draft legislation prohibits physicians from referring patients to outpatient facilities where they or their family hold a financial interest. Radiologists and hospital-based physicians are exempt from this restriction. The Massachusetts Chapter of the ACC will be working closely with the ACC, the Massachusetts Medical Society and other physician groups to let legislators know about the harmful effects of this bill on physician practice and patient care.



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### **New Heart Health Benefits to Medicare Beneficiaries**

As of Jan. 1, Medicare is offering seniors several preventive services aimed at catching heart disease at its earliest stages. All beneficiaries will be eligible for cardiovascular screenings consisting of blood tests to measure total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels. New enrollees can take advantage of a "Welcome to Medicare" screening that includes an electrocardiogram as part of the overall check-up. For more information, [click here](#).



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### **ACC Submits Coding Recommendation to CMS**

The ACC recently asked the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to review cardiac magnetic resonance codes (CPT 75552-75555) on the grounds that physician work values are undervalued and should be reviewed during the upcoming five-year review process. The ACC worked closely with the American College of Radiology (ACR) in developing this recommendation, and the ACR submitted the same recommendation in comments to CMS. The ACC and the ACR based their recommendation on the following reasons: new technological advances have dramatically changed cardiac magnetic resonance imaging since the codes were last reviewed 12 years ago; the accuracy and validity of the survey process in 1993 is open to question; and rank order anomalies exist with current codes.



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### **Two States Push for Malpractice Reform**

Doctors in Maryland are close to celebrating a legislative victory in the battle for tort reform, while physicians in Washington state launched a new campaign to get relief from the skyrocketing cost of medical liability insurance. On Dec. 29, Maryland legislators passed a compromise bill, endorsed by the Maryland Medical Society and Maryland Hospital Association, that lowers the cap on non-economic damages from \$1.6 million to \$812,500. Gov. Robert Ehrlich, Jr. has threatened to veto the bill due to

a controversial provision that institutes a 2 percent tax on HMO premiums. Legislators have pledged to override the veto in order to prevent a 33 percent increase in medical liability insurance rates this year.

In Washington, a group of physicians and hospitals submitted [Initiative 330](#) to the state legislature on Dec. 28. The initiative would cap non-economic damages and limit the amount of fees collected by lawyers in medical liability cases. Legislators can pass the measure this session or defer the decision to voters by placing the initiative on the November 2005 ballot.

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#### **Lewis Named House Appropriations Chair**

Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., beat out two legislative colleagues to win the powerful chairmanship of the House Appropriations Committee. Selected by the 28-member Republican Steering Committee, Lewis will replace Rep. C.W. Bill Young, R-Fla, who held the post for the maximum term allotment of 6 years. As chairman, Lewis will oversee the appropriations of revenue for the federal government, including the Department of Health and Human Services.



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#### **FDA Warns of Painkiller Risks**

In light of the recent revelations that commonly prescribed painkillers such as Vioxx, Bextra and Celebrex raise the risk of heart attack and stroke, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a public health alert about the serious side effects of this class of drugs known as Cox-2 inhibitors. [Click here](#) to view the FDA's recommendations for utilization of these drugs.



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#### **Cancer Drug Gets New Label**

The FDA approved new labeling language for the cancer drug Avastin to reflect risks associated with usage during chemotherapy. In August 2004, the FDA notified health care professionals of higher incidence of heart attack and stroke among patients who were taking Avastin in combination with chemotherapy. For more information on this FDA warning, [click here](#).



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#### **Medicare Helps Seniors Kick Smoking Habit**

CMS recently [announced](#) a new proposal to help seniors quit smoking. Citing the benefits of smoking cessation at any age, CMS will cover eligible seniors who enroll in counseling services designed to help them stop smoking. The proposal involves Medicare beneficiaries who have an illness caused or complicated by smoking, including heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, lung disease, weak bones, blood clots and cataracts -- the diseases that account for the bulk of Medicare spending today. [Click here](#) to view the draft coverage decision.



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#### **New Commission Tackles Health Care Reform**

As part of the Medicare prescription drug law, the Government Accountability Office is tasked with appointing a 14-member commission to evaluate the current U.S. health care system and make recommendations to the President and members of Congress on strategies for reform with a specific focus on expanding the availability of affordable health care coverage. Applications are available until Jan. 14, 2005. To find out more, [click here](#).

