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ACOs' Death Knell?

Fresh from the American Medical Association's annual House of Delegates meeting in Chicago, Medical Society of the State of New York President Dr. Paul Hamlin said the fate of ACOs was the meeting's hot issue. "We predict the ACO bill will go down," said Dr. Hamlin, referring to the concept of establishing accountable care organizations to measure doctors' and hospitals' performance and cost of services. It is a key proposal in federal health reform, but physicians are pushing back. For starters, Dr. Hamlin said, the New York delegation introduced a measure at the meeting calling on the federal government to change its ACO definition to eliminate ACO advisory boards. Those boards would "effectively constrain care for patients and give the government more control," he said. The resolution passed the AMA House overwhelmingly. "Hospitals don't want ACOs; even the Mayo Clinic doesn't like them," he said. "The feeling is this is the end of the idea."

OMIG Won't Be Declawed

Nursing home and hospitals were quick to say the ouster of Medicaid Inspector General Jim Sheehan signaled the Cuomo administration opposed his controversial audit tactics. But according to an Albany insider, that's not the case. In fact, the administration is concerned that two recently passed bills that would ban the Medicaid IG's office from extrapolating losses from technical billing errors into large fines and penalties could cost the state \$416 million a year in lost recoveries. "Cuomo just wants his own person in the job," said the source. "It's not about Sheehan's performance." Despite Mr. Cuomo's request for Mr. Sheehan's resignation, the office is continuing business as usual. The announcement of a replacement is expected this week, the source said.

They Called Her Madame

News that copper heiress Huguette Clark had died at 104 put a spotlight on an unusual living arrangement. Ms. Clark for years had been a paying guest in a single room at Beth Israel Medical Center, where the staff fondly called her "Madame Clark," using the French pronunciation. A hospital source said she had been admitted by her physician to the former Doctors' Hospital near her home on the Upper East Side, which Beth Israel ran as its Singer Division before selling it. "When we moved downtown, she came with us—she liked us," the source said. Ms. Clark left Beth Israel \$1 million of her \$400 million fortune. The state Department of Health said it knew of her living situation with Beth Israel, unorthodox in that Ms. Clark did not need acute care. But it was legal since she was not receiving Medicaid or Medicare. DOH also said her years-long stay was never included in BI's annual "average length of stay" figures.

Exchange's offerings raise consumer hopes

A coalition of business and consumer groups is cautiously optimistic that the New York Health Benefit Exchange Act will make health insurance available to most New Yorkers. Some groups, such as the American Cancer Society, have reservations, citing potential conflicts of interest in permitting representatives of "big insurance" to serve on the five unpaid regional advisory boards created by the measure. Indeed, insurers on Friday hailed that provision as a major victory. The Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of New York said the bill's requirement that licensed insurance providers sit on those boards showed that "IABNY left its mark on key legislation," and credited the Cuomo administration with helping.

The Health Care for All New York Coalition, composed of 11 advocacy groups, including the ACS, said in an analysis that, overall, the measure accomplishes many things. It gives the exchange the authority to fight for consumers and small business on the price of coverage and the quality that plans offer. It also allows the exchange to set mandatory standards for a benefits package, merge markets to lower prices, and address any disparities in coverage.

According to the language of the 19-page bill, consumers will find new choices and detailed information on how to pick a plan. The bill calls for assigning quality ratings to each health plan offered, and ranking plans from "bronze" to "silver" to "gold," based on the depth of coverage. It also mandates dental coverage offerings. Transparency of rules, fees, costs and benefits is stressed throughout the legislation.

Summarizing its position, the health care group said that since the bill permits those "with financial skin in the game" to make recommendations to Gov. Andrew Cuomo, it is up to him and his staff to see that the exchange results in "healthier New Yorkers, not fatter wallets" for some stakeholders.

At A Glance

NAME CHANGE: The New York Association of Homes & Services for the Aging is changing its name to LeadingAge New York, following the January lead of its parent organization in Washington. For now, the website address, www.nyahsa.org, remains the same. The group has represented nursing homes and home service providers for 50 years.

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