Physicians prepare for new immunization law

By Debra Fieleschman
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The Academy is taking steps to help physicians comply with a new federal law that requires them to provide patients with detailed information about three common vaccines before administering them.

Beginning April 15, physicians in the public and private sectors must distribute immunization brochures, prepared by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), to their patients. The brochures, mandated by the federal Vaccine Injury Compensation Act of 1986, explain the risks and benefits of DPT, MMR and polio vaccines.

According to the law, anyone in the United States who administers these three vaccines must ensure that patients read and understand the brochures before administering them.

The Academy recently sent members a printed sample copy of the three (CDC) brochures. As a convenience, members can order bulk quantities of the brochures, at cost, through the Academy. An order form was included with the letter. The cost is $15 for 100 brochures. The brochures also will be available in Spanish.

According to the law, private sector physicians can produce their own versions of the brochures, as long as they list and explain all points contained in the CDC version. However, AAP legal counsel advises that physicians opt to use the CDC-prepared brochures.

The Academy, which believes the brochures are long, complex and could frighten parents, is working on legislation that would make compliance with the law more practical and effective, AAP President Daniel Shea, M.D., said.

Meanwhile, legal experts advise that physicians should do their best to comply with the law. A page one, January 1992 AAP News article explained the law in detail. Some important points physicians need to know about the law are recapped here:

- The CDC is providing public health clinics with free copies of the brochures; private physicians will be provided with camera-ready artwork to make their own copies of the brochures. Private physicians also can purchase bulk copies of the brochures, at cost, through the Academy. ($15 per 100 copies).

- Physicians and others who administer vaccines in both public and private sectors must ensure that the parent or guardian reads and understands the brochures before each and every dose of the three vaccines is given. For example, if a child receives four doses of DTP, the parent must read and understand the brochure four times.

- In public clinics, the law states that parents must sign an informed consent form stating they understand the risks and benefits as explained in the brochure. Each brochure contains an informed consent form.

- Consent forms are not required in private physician's offices. However, AAP legal counsel advises private physicians to use informed consent forms to protect against future liability suits.

- The brochures are available in English, Spanish, French, Chinese and Vietnamese.

AAP candidates discuss qualifications

Editor's note: The National Nominating Committee has named Maurice Edward Keenan, M.D., and Betty Lowe, M.D., as candidates for AAP vice president. The winner of the election, which will be held this spring, will take office during the 1992 Annual Meeting. Ultimately, the winner will serve as 1993-94 AAP president. In this fourth and final installment of election coverage, each candidate has provided an answer to a question posed by the nominating committee: What do you think qualifies you to be AAP President?

Betty Lowe, M.D.

During my career as a pediatrician, I have been a primary care practitioner in a medium-sized community within a rural area, member of an academic department active in patient care and student resident teaching, and medical director of a Children's Hospital involved with medical administration, health care financial and referral relationships between practicing pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists. With this background, I have an understanding of children and family problems in obtaining quality health care, as well as the issues of concern (economics, professional stature, satisfying lifestyles) to pediatricians providing this care to their patients.

Active in AAP activities since the early 1970s, I have served as state president, alternate district chairman, district chairman and as a member of several committees and task forces. I have gained experience in the functions and responsibilities of the executive committee. I have been an active member of the Council on child abuse and neglect and the Council on epidemic disease. As a member of the Council on ethics, I have been responsible for the development of the current code of ethics.

I believe that AAP is the only organization that represents the needs of physicians in the health care field. We can work together to build a better organization. As president, I will work to make AAP a viable organization that is responsive to the needs of our members.

Maurice Edward Keenan, M.D.

We are entering an era where the rationing of resources is a major focus in health care. Today many children face perils to their health such as the Oregon waiver, ill defined access, and inadequate nutrition. Sophisticated technologies compete for funds with prevention programs and health maintenance. The politically unrepresented child has never been in greater peril.

But there is opportunity in this worrisome time. We must carry our message to government at every level: delivery of preventive health care to all will in itself result in reduction of wasteful health expenditures. We are poised to make forceful demands for linking nutrition, health, and education as a basic right for every child.

I will encourage practice models that allow all pediatricians to practice in a way that their professional life and personal life are satisfying. Compensation must be built into our...