Where the AMA stands on 7 of the year’s biggest health care issues

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It has been a consequential year in American medicine and U.S. health care policy. In its advocacy at the state and national levels, the AMA has put the interests of patients and doctors first and shown itself to be the physician’s powerful ally in health care.

Sometimes the AMA has made its presence felt on issues grabbing headlines in major news media outlets, such as the continuing toll of the opioid epidemic or inhumane conditions at the Southern border. In other cases, the AMA has worked to make progress that may be less visible to patients but that is also highly significant. That includes addressing the documentation and prior authorization burdens that have meant doctors spend two hours on clerical tasks for every hour they spend with patients.

To get an issue-by-issue rundown, you should read “American Medical Association: Advocacy in Action.” In the meantime, here are highlights of seven big health care issues where the AMA has made its mark this year.

1. **E/M overhaul aims to reduce physicians’ documentation burdens**
   A major overhaul in evaluation and management (E/M) office visit codes for 2021—the first in more than 25 years—shows the potential to significantly reduce documentation burden and provide physicians with more time with patients. The AMA worked with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and convened specialty medical societies and other health professional organizations to simplify the requirements and make them clinically relevant.
2 The push to prevent surprise billing: 8 things to know
Patients, physicians and policymakers are deeply concerned about the impact that unanticipated medical bills are having on patient out-of-pocket costs and the patient-physician relationship. The AMA and more than 100 state and specialty organizations have laid out a set of core principles for policymakers that would ensure that patients aren’t burdened by unanticipated out-of-network medical bills.

The AMA and partner organizations continue to work with lawmakers at the federal and state levels to ensure patients are protected from unexpected medical bills while maintaining incentives for insurers to negotiate network participation contracts in good faith.

3 Opioid epidemic: 6 key steps that states should take now
The AMA released—and is urging states to use—a national policy roadmap based on in-depth analysis of the response to the opioid epidemic by four states: Colorado, Mississippi, North Carolina and Pennsylvania. The road map analyzes successful strategies used and lessons learned to provide tangible ways that policymakers can help end the epidemic. Learn more about the AMA Opioid Task Force’s work at the End the Epidemic website.

4 Federal law cripples telehealth in Medicare. New bill changes that.
A bipartisan Senate bill unveiled recently would make it easier for patients enrolled in Medicare to receive telehealth services from physicians. The AMA is joining more than 100 other organizations in endorsing the bill, the Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) Health Act of 2019.

5 What CMS can do to fix prior authorization
CMS asked for suggestions on cutting administrative burdens on physicians and others in health care. The AMA’s response first sets its sight on prior authorization, the time-consuming cost-control process that often restricts or delays access to treatments, drugs and services that patients need. CMS is now tackling prior authorization as part of its Patients Over Paperwork initiative, reflecting the AMA’s success in calling attention to the issue. Learn more about the AMA’s efforts on prior authorization at FixPriorAuth.org.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/health-care-advocacy/judicial-advocacy/where-ama-stands-7-year-s-biggest-health-care-issues
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How border conditions threaten our nation’s decency, health
AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, has issued a clarion call to the country to avoid turning a blind eye to the inhumane conditions among people claiming asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border who are being held in detention.

AMA to Supreme Court: Rescinding DACA would harm health care
Rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program would deliver a severe blow to the nation’s health care workforce and pose a threat to patients and public health. The AMA has joined 32 other leading health organizations in filing an amicus brief that seeks to protect the DACA program.