

February Virtual Mentor examines unwarranted variations in health care

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This month's issue of *Virtual Mentor*, the AMA's online ethics journal, examines the causes of unwarranted variations and the effects they have on the cost and quality of care.

For the last several decades, geographic differences in the type and amount of medical services U.S. patients receive have come under increased scrutiny by physicians, policymakers and those who pay for medical care. Variations that do not appear to correlate with differences in patient demographics or the severity of their disease burden are termed "unwarranted."

February *Virtual Mentor* contributors try to identify solutions to unwarranted variations, from more research into the effectiveness of drugs, devices and diagnostic services, to quality-based models for physician payment.

Some issue highlights:

- "Presenting unwelcome research findings": When talking to physicians about practice variation, what is the most effective approach?
- "Standardized clinical assessment and management plans (SCAMPs): A clinician-led approach to unwarranted practice variation": A distinguishing feature of a SCAMP is its ability to capture knowledge-based diversions from a recommended pathway and to "learn" from such individualized patient management.
- "The complex relationship between cost and quality in U.S. health care": The medical community must conduct research and develop standards for measuring and monitoring overutilization of services.