

In June, the US Senate approved the American Osteopathic Association-supported "Bipartisan Patient Protection Act of 2001" (S 1052) by a vote of 59-36. The new bill is an updated version of S 283, crafted by Senators McCain (R-AZ), Edwards (D-NC), and Kennedy (D-MA) in January.

Although both bills allow physicians to determine medical necessity, hold health plans accountable for their actions, and ensure a fair appeals process for patients, S 1052 further clarifies that a treating physician or hospital cannot be held liable in federal court for negligent denial of coverage; further clarifies that the exclusionary language for treating physicians, healthcare professionals, and hospitals cannot be construed to limit health plan liability; further tightens the limited exceptions for full exhaustion of review process by eliminating reference to "allegation" of irreparable harm or death; and excludes from federal liability persons whose involvement with the group health plan was solely to provide advice or administrative services to the employer or other health plan sponsor in the selection of health insurance coverage.

In Senate debates preceding passage of S 1052, amendments (59) on medical necessity, employer liability, and scope and caps on damages were offered with compromises reached on each, except caps for any noneconomic punitive damages, though the bill does identify an amount of damages awarded that attorneys can demand as payment, further designating this bill as for the benefit of patients and not trial lawyers.

The American Osteopathic Association expects Representatives Ganske (R-IA), Dingell (D-MI), and Norwood (R-GA) will offer S 1052 as amended on the House floor and request a vote.

Changes in the white matter of the brain observed with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) indicate that there is continued maturation to an average age of 48 years,

according to results of a study published in the May issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*. Although observations confirm that development of gray matter ends at adolescence, results of this trial refute the current view that all brain development stops at the end of adolescence and declines thereafter.

The study, which examined the effects of the aging process on brain development, involved MRI of white and gray matter in the frontal and temporal lobes of 70 healthy men between the ages of 19 and 76 years. Age-related loss in gray matter volume in frontal and temporal lobes was observed, while white matter continued to develop.

As scientists focused research on the front part of the brain where abnormalities associated with Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, and drug addiction are located, the findings may aid in identifying factors that interfere with development.

Eighty-one percent of patients with psoriatic arthritis (PsA) who received etanercept (Enbrel) achieved PsA response criteria and 55% achieved American College of Rheumatology response criteria in 36 weeks. Patients with psoriasis who received the drug achieved 62% improvement, according to the Psoriasis Area and Severity Index in the same period.

Fifty-eight of 60 patients drawn from a previous study of PsA and psoriasis who were given etanercept and who received significant benefit were included in the present study, which was designed to examine the drug's effect over 24 weeks.

Forty-three percent of 28 patients taking concomitant methotrexate at baseline decreased their dose, and 25% discontinued taking the drug. Sixty-seven percent of 18 patients taking corticosteroids at baseline decreased their dose and 44% discontinued use. No serious adverse events or infections were reported. Study results were pre-

sented at a June 14 meeting of the European League Against Rheumatism.

In another study, reported in the June 15 issue of the *Archives of Dermatology*, people with severe psoriasis treated with systemic drugs had twice the risk of having lymphomas and nonmelanoma skin cancer, according to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania. People with less severe psoriasis treated with lotions also had increased risk, though not as great.

Researchers note the need to identify whether cancer is caused by the condition or medication.

After discontinuing use of inhaled corticosteroids, patients with moderate persistent asthma who received inhaled recombinant human soluble interleukin-4 receptor (IL-4R) avoided declines in forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV₁) and daily morning FEV₁, compared with a group receiving placebo.

The double-blind study involved 62 patients withdrawn from dependence on inhaled corticosteroids who were randomly assigned to receive 12 once-weekly nebulizations of 0.75 mg, 1.5 mg, or 3.0 mg of either IL-4R or placebo.

In addition to avoiding declines in FEV₁ and daily morning FEV₁, patients who received 3.0 mg of IL-4R once weekly had an absence of increase of asthma symptom scores, compared with the placebo group.

The report appears in the June issue of the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*.

The virus strain that is used to produce the measles vaccine for humans caused remission of lymphoma in mice, according to researchers at Mayo Clinic.

The study—the first to examine the effects of the vaccine virus on lymphoma

cells—involved derivatives of the Edmonston-B strain of the measles vaccine and their effect on both aggressive and slow-growing B-cell lymphoma. The vaccine strain of the virus injected into the tumor was followed by remission of large, established human B-cell lymphoma, as well as considerable slowing of tumor progression.

Mayo Clinic is conducting a study of the live measles vaccine virus in patients who have lymphoma, which is on the increase nationally.

The June 15 issue of *Blood* carries the report of this study.

Doubling time of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels is the most important predictor to determine which men are most likely to have recurrence after surgery for prostate cancer, according to researchers at Mayo Clinic.

In men whose PSA levels doubled in 6 months or less after surgery, 62% had a recurrence, while cancer recurred in 13% of men with a PSA doubling time of 10 years or more. Of the latter group, 87% were cancer free in 5 years. Researchers note that men with doubling times of 6 months or less now have a good indication that additional treatment may be beneficial.

Researchers analyzed the medical records of 2809 men who had radical prostatectomies between 1989 and 1993. One third of the patients had increased PSA levels after surgery.

The report appears in the June issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.

Women with breast cancer who smoke have an increased risk of pulmonary metastatic disease, compared with nonsmokers, according to results of a study reported in the June issue of *Chest*.

Researchers compared the medical records of 87 women with breast cancer and pulmonary metastatic disease with a control group of 174 women with breast cancer without pulmonary metastatic disease.

Among women with pulmonary metastatic disease, 38% had smoked and 24.1% currently smoked, compared with nonsmokers (29% and 15.3%, respective-

ly). The findings may explain higher breast cancer fatality among smokers, though the study indicates an association and not a cause-and-effect relationship.

Biopsies aided by transrectal ultrasound were four times more likely to detect prostate cancer, according to results of a study published in the June 9 issue of *Lancet*. The new technique detects regions of the prostate that have hypervascularity for sampling with needle biopsy.

The study involved 84 men, 24 of whom had prostate cancer, who were assessed independently by two investigators using biopsy with contrast-enhanced color Doppler ultrasound and conventional biopsy technique.

Prostate cancer was detected in 23 patients with contrast-medium-enhanced color Doppler targeted biopsy and in 17 patients with conventional gray-scale ultrasonographically guided biopsy.

Researchers note that men between the ages of 45 and 60 years—an age group at higher risk for hypervascular cancers—should be assessed with the new technique.

The Food and Drug Administration has not approved the contrast agent that allows the prostate to be visualized.

Children who receive probiotic milk have a reduced risk of respiratory tract infections, according to results of the first long-term trial involving probiotic bacteria.

The study involved 571 healthy children between the ages of 1 and 6 years at day care centers who were randomly assigned to groups that received milk with the *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (ATCC 53103) strain or a control group that received milk without the probiotic. Parents recorded respiratory and gastrointestinal symptoms and the number of absences from day care.

The probiotic strain *L. rhamnosus* has documented health effects that include a positive effect on the immune system and promotion of recovery and reduced incidence of diarrhea.

Children in the groups that received *L. rhamnosus* had 4.9 fewer days of absence and a 17% reduction in respiratory tract

infections and related complications, compared with children who received milk only (5.8 days). Further, children who received probiotic milk had a 19% reduction in antibiotic treatment for respiratory tract infection.

The report of this study appears in the June 2 issue of *BMJ*.

Men with exaggerated systolic reactivity—greater than 20 mm Hg—to stress had an 87% increased risk of ischemic stroke compared with less reactive men, according to results of an 11-year study. Further, men in the same group had a 72% increased risk of all stroke. Finally, men with exaggerated blood pressure reactivity who were less educated were three times more likely to have a stroke than less reactive, better educated men. Although blood pressure is linked with atherosclerosis and hypertension, an association between reactivity and stroke had not been established.

The study involved 2303 men with an average age of 50 years from a population-based, longitudinal study of risk factors for ischemic heart disease.

The report appears in the June issue of *Stroke*.

Onset of heart attack in high-risk people correlated to their exposure to high levels of air pollution in a study designed to examine the short-term effects of air pollution on the heart.

The 1.5-year study, reported in the June 12 issue of *Circulation*, involved 489 at-risk men and 283 at-risk women interviewed 4 days after heart attack. Results indicate that heart attack risk increased 48% 2 hours after exposure and 62% 24 hours after exposure.

Previous studies linked number of deaths to increases in air particulate matter less than 2.5 μm in diameter (PM-2.5), which is emitted by cars, power plants, and industry.

The study also examined health risks from ozone—smog created from mixed air pollutants—and found no data linking it to heart attacks. The findings may be used to entreat the Environmental Protection Agency to consider stricter air standards. ♦