



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

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Advancing Health and Health Equity through Policy

Inside This Issue

Letter from the President	1
Surprise Billing	2
Firearm Safety and Gun Violence	2
Beyond <i>Dobbs</i> : Implications for Massachusetts Physicians	2
Board of Registration in Medicine (BORIM)	2
Behavioral Health Crisis	2
Legislative Victories	3
Announcing MMS Advocacy Staff Changes	3
MMS Offers Testimony	3
Looking Ahead	3

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The MMS ADVOCATE

Letter from the President

Leveraging the collective strength of our 25,000 members, the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a respected health care leader at both the state and federal levels. Advocating on behalf of physicians and our patients remains central to the Medical Society's mission.

Throughout the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and now as we grapple with the spread of monkeypox, the MMS has worked closely with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to review and distribute reliable information that physicians have needed to respond to the very dynamic public health landscape.

The MMS has also served as our advocate and ally, addressing numerous issues that impact the practice of medicine and supporting our ability as physicians to provide quality care to our patients. The Medical Society effectively works with a broad range of coalitions to address issues that span a spectrum, from reimbursement and administrative burden to health equity and access to care, and more.

Recent accomplishments that have had an immediate impact on our practices include successfully defeating a nearly 10% reduction in Medicare reimbursement that would have gone into effect this year, as well as securing the delayed implementation of the redundant state notice and disclosure requirements until 2025.

The Medical Society also continues to advocate for payment parity for telehealth, and we are working collaboratively with the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine to make permanent the two-year training requirement for international medical graduates, eliminating a barrier to licensure for foreign medical graduates and accelerating their ability to join the physician workforce.

In terms of patient care, I am very proud of the Medical Society's work in support of the Mental Health ABC Act, which coupled with vital funding and resources, will improve access to critical mental health care services, address the boarding crisis in our emergency departments, and support key initiatives to bolster and diversify our workforce. Similarly, the MMS worked hard to promote state protections for providers of reproductive and gender-affirming care, ensuring patients continue to have access to evidence-based care.

I am also particularly proud of the Medical Society's consistent stance on effective gun control and the prevention of gun violence. Looking ahead, we will advocate for the creation of a task force to continue the work of strengthening the Commonwealth's model gun control regulations, and then we will work with neighbors in other states to share best practices so that we may collectively extend sensible policies and regulations to other states.

I encourage you to take a few moments to familiarize yourself with just some of the work our Medical Society has accomplished in recent months, and I thank you for your support, which makes this work possible.

Theodore A. Calianos II, MD, FACS
President



Theodore A. Calianos II,
MD, FACS



Surprise Billing

This summer, the Medical Society successfully advocated to further delay implementation of state notice and price transparency requirements until

January 1, 2025. A 2020 law requires providers to notify patients of their network status, disclose allowed amounts and facility fees, and give patients the opportunity to obtain more information about out-of-pocket costs. Much of these patient disclosures are required under the No Surprises Act (NSA), which has largely been in effect since January 1, 2022. Recognizing the challenges posed by overlapping state and federal requirements, the legislature heeded the Medical Society's call to delay the state requirements, avoiding significant administrative burden for physicians, as well as the potential for confusion for patients.

The MMS, along with physician colleagues from several specialty societies and the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association, also successfully defeated legislative efforts to pass a standalone out-of-network (OON) solution to replace the NSA, which would have imposed a default rate on OON services and eliminated access to an independent dispute resolution process that is included as part of the NSA.

Firearm Safety and Gun Violence

The MMS continues to advocate for policies that improve firearm safety while developing resources to assist physicians in conversations with patients about firearms.

- Supported the Making America Safe and Secure (MASS) Act introduced by Senator Markey
- Trained physicians as instructors in Stop the Bleed/severe hemorrhage control to educate local communities
- Convened Firearm Safety and Gun Violence Prevention Advisory Group of subject matter experts to provide advice, innovation, and recommendations for furthering safety and violence prevention
- Existing resources available at www.massmed.org/firearms

Beyond Dobbs: Implications for Massachusetts Physicians

In July, the legislature passed a law to protect patients and health care providers and increase access to reproductive and gender-affirming care. The MMS strongly supported passage of An Act Expanding Protections for Reproductive and Gender-Affirming Care, which establishes meaningful protections for physicians, providers, and patients as we collectively navigate a post-Roe landscape. Specifically, the act provides vital legal and professional protections that prohibit extradition of a provider to another state for providing or assisting in legally protected health care activities (including abortion), prohibits the state from cooperating with investigations into legally protected health care activity in other states, and creates a cause of action for Massachusetts providers for interference with legally protected health care activity.

The MMS also helped draft new professional protections that insulate physicians and other providers from adverse action by their relevant board of registration for providing legally protected health care activity that does not otherwise fall outside the appropriate standard of care.

The law also expands access to reproductive health care services like emergency contraception and abortion and addresses the affordability of care by requiring insurance coverage of abortion without cost-sharing, which increases equitable access to care. Importantly, the law codifies due deference to physicians' medical judgment with language prohibiting hospital systems for overriding a physician's determination as to whether an abortion later in pregnancy is authorized under the law.

Board of Registration in Medicine (BORIM)

The MMS continues to represent the interests of physicians before BORIM, arguing for sensible policies that promote professionalism and quality without encumbering the delivery of care.

Recent achievements include the following:

- The Interim Policy on Post-Graduate Training for International Medical Graduates, working to make permanent reduced GME requirements from three years to two years.
- The Interim Policy on USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills Examination for Limited Licensure has been rescinded and the Step 2 CS exam has been discontinued.
- Interim Policy on Emergency Temporary and Full Licenses has been extended through December 31, 2022.

Behavioral Health Crisis

The MMS remains committed to advocating for funding and resources to address the ongoing behavioral health crisis.

- Supported the nearly \$4 billion in relief funding from sources such as the American Rescue Plan, including \$400 million allocated to behavioral health workforce and infrastructure supports
- Supported passage of the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act to address physician burnout and mental health
- Published *Integrating Mental Health and Substance Use Care in Your Practice: Models, Challenges, and Recommendations*
- Promote use of the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program (MCPAP), MCPAP for Moms, and the Massachusetts Consultation Service for Treatment of Addiction and Pain (MCSTAP) for physicians needing advice on mental health or substance use evidence-based care for their patients

Legislative Victories

The MMS remains engaged on a broad range of state and federal issues. A few of the Society's recent victories include successful advocacy for the following:

- Passage of a comprehensive mental health law, including sweeping provisions to improve access to inpatient and outpatient care, reduce emergency department boarding, expand insurance coverage, increase enforcement of state and federal parity laws, enhance community and school-based services, and support workforce development initiatives.
- CMS approval of the MMS-supported bid by Massachusetts to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to one year, representing a meaningful step toward eliminating inequities in maternal health outcomes.
- A law enabling minors to consent to PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, a daily HIV-prevention medication for adolescents. This policy will enable young people to access a critical preventive tool that will decrease the rate of new HIV infections.
- Massachusetts passed new laws and funded initiatives to address social determinants of health, including \$110 million in funding for universal free school meals and a new policy that streamlines the SNAP benefits application process.

Announcing MMS Advocacy Staff Changes

The MMS is pleased to announce the promotion of Leda Anderson, JD, to director of advocacy and government relations and Casey A. Rojas, JD, MBE, to federal relations and health equity manager.



Leda Anderson, JD



Casey A. Rojas, JD, MBE

In her role, Leda leads the Medical Society's advocacy, working primarily at the state level on various health and public health issues, with a focus on promoting equity in health care. She also serves as the staff liaison to the MMS Committee on Maternal and Perinatal Welfare.

In his capacity, Casey heads the Medical Society's federal advocacy and serves as the workstream co-lead on the MMS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council, and as staff liaison for the MMS Committee on Diversity in Medicine.

MMS Offers Testimony

The MMS routinely reviews proposed bills and regulations with the potential for impacting the practice of medicine and patient care. The Medical Society provides testimony to positively inform and shape proposed legislation and prevent harmful policies. In the last year, MMS testified on 20 proposed pieces of legislation including:

Access to Care

- Supported An Act Assuring Prompt Access to Health Care, which seeks to improve affordability of care by extending exemptions from cost sharing to outpatient evaluation and management services.

Health Equity

- Supported An Act Establishing Health Equity at All Levels in Government (the HEALING Act).
- Supported An Act Relative to Parentage to Promote Children's Security.

Practice of Medicine

- Supported An Act Relative to Insurance Companies and Quality Measures, which establishes new ways to measure health care costs and value.

Environmental Health

- Supported An Act to Prevent Biomass Energy to Protect the Air We Breathe, which declassifies biomass as renewable energy.

Looking Ahead

The new Massachusetts legislative session will begin in January, and we expect the legislature to address a broad range of health care-related issues and policies.

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the Commonwealth's historic 2012 cost containment law, creating the Health Policy Commission (HPC) and its sister agency, the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA), and establishing a health care cost growth benchmark.

As policymakers assess the successes and challenges of past reforms, we anticipate new proposals and policies to address the changing health care landscape. We also expect a continued consideration of reforms proposed to invest more in primary care and behavioral health care services.

On the public health front, the MMS will also continue to work with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and other partners to provide the timely information and resources physicians require to effectively respond to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and monkeypox.

In particular, the MMS will continue to promote pediatric COVID-19 vaccinations, as well as the adoption of boosters, and the Medical Society will encourage the accurate reporting of mandated demographic case data that is so vital for an effective, equitable response to monkeypox.



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