

2010 Session Report

Prepared by The Kowalski Group, LLC

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The 2010 session adjourned at midnight, May 5. There were a number of significant actions taken that relate to the Physician Assistant profession, and we are pleased to outline them here for your review.

P.A. written orders

Legislation was passed to provide that registered nurses will execute written orders by a Physician Assistant that are within the scope of practice. We can report that this is a solid scope expansion and role clarification for the profession (SB 428).

P.A. certification of student athlete health

In a second scope expansion, legislation was passed (SB 456) that provides new training to athletic coaches to recognize when a student athlete may have suffered a concussion. The bill provides new authority for Physician Assistants to examine and certify that an athlete is ready to rejoin the team and participate in contact sports.

P.A. reports on reports on impaired drivers

In another recognition of the important role Physician Assistants play in ensuring the health and safety of patients, legislation was enacted (SB 414) that specifically references practitioners as having authority to report a patient to the Department of Motor Vehicles when the individual appears incapable of driving safely due to a medical condition. The same bill also includes a rewrite of the handicapped placard law—Physician Assistants retain current authority to certify a patient's need for a placard.

P.A. inclusion in charity care

Legislation was passed (HB 5452) that permits out-of-state practitioners—including Physician Assistants—to come into Connecticut and treat at medical charity or sporting events such as Mission of Mercy or the Special Olympics.

SAGA transferred to Medicaid

In a major policy change, the 2010 session approved legislation (HB 5545) that takes advantage of new federal rules to include all SAGA clients in the Medicaid program. We believe this will result in an increase in access to health care services for many vulnerable citizens. It builds on ConnAPA's excellent testimony earlier this year to the Appropriations Committee that cautioned policymakers over proposed reductions to the state's healthcare safety net.

Insurance and tort reforms pass

Several bills were enacted that continue to improve the accountability of managed care organizations: **SB 17**—provides greater oversight of the practice where MCO entities “rent” their provider networks to third parties. **HB 5004**—requires MCOs to provide certain municipal clients with aggregate encounter and claims data so that customers can see where their premium dollars are going. **HB 5303**—requires MCOs to report aggregate claims denial data to the Department of Insurance for publication in the consumer report card. Finally, changes to the tort system were included in **SB 248**. Mandatory mediation will exist in all lawsuits alleging medical malpractice or negligence.

Bills that did not pass

- **HB 5258**—a major Scope of Practice bill that created a committee at the Department of Public Health to “vet” all scope requests before they could be submitted to the legislature. ConnAPA testified in opposition to the bill.
- **SB 14**—legislation would prohibit patient co-payments for

routine annual physicals or check ups. Although it was unfortunate the bill did not pass, the new federal healthcare reform law contains similar provisions that will take effect in coming years.

- **SB 393**—provided additional steps in leveling the playing field between health practitioners and MCOs. Called “Standards and Contracts,” the bill, among other provisions, required payment of claims submitted electronically within 20 days.

Finally, the budget . . .

The major bill of the 2010 session, the budget legislation, passed both chambers on the final day. The legislation addressed a projected \$750 million deficit in the fiscal year that begins on July 1. Time will tell whether the accounting maneuvers, increased bonding and projections of additional federal revenue will do the trick. What most observers see is a potential catastrophe awaiting Connecticut’s next Governor in January 2011. The budget for the first two years of the new administration could be out of balance by as much as \$8 billion.

And a thank you!

We very much appreciate the fact that many ConnAPA members answered the call when asked to contact their legislators on key issues this session. We can absolutely assure you that these contacts are very important and make a difference. Although the session has ended, ConnAPA’s legislative team will be meeting this summer and fall to develop an aggressive legislative program for 2011. We welcome your involvement and interest! Finally, I want to thank the co-chairs of ConnAPA’s legislative committee: Jonathan Weber and Bill Kohlhepp for their countless hours of involvement this past session.

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