MU's Center for Health Policy presents IMPACT, an e-newsletter about timely local, state and national health policy issues and initiatives. MU's Center for Health Policy is dedicated to helping Missourians achieve better health care through objective analysis and in-depth understanding of key policy issues facing our state. For more information, please visit http://healthpolicy.missouri.edu/.

**MU Task Force on Health Disparities**

In consultation with the Center for Health Policy, UM President Dr. Elson Floyd has established a task force to address health disparities within the University system and the state. The task force is charged with helping the University and the state prepare for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse population. The task force’s immediate goal is to ensure that minorities receive equal access and quality of care once they make contact with a UM System hospital or clinic. A second goal is to help the state and nation discover ways to improve access to health care. Representatives from MU, UMKC and UMSL serve on the task force, including CHP members Dr. Kris Hagglund, (who is co-chairing with John Ma from UMKC), Gwen Ratermann, Stan Hudson and Dr. Lanis Hicks.

**Telehealth Network to significantly expand services**

The Missouri Telehealth Network (MTN) recently entered into an agreement with the Missouri Primary Care Association (MPCA) to expand the telehealth network to an additional 14 Community Health Centers throughout Missouri. Additionally, MTN is in final negotiations with the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to connect 21 new hospitals to MTN along with the DHSS for use in bioterrorism preparedness activities. Having all community health center hub sites and the new hospitals on the network will provide marked potential for use of the MTN for clinical, educational and administrative activities.

**IT has bipartisan support in U.S. Senate**

It appears the potential that information technology (IT) offers to the health care industry could be a federal policy issue both parties are willing to work on in the coming year. A recent bipartisan op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* co-authored by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., states that Congress must support information technology advancements that "will improve care, lower costs, improve quality, and empower consumers." They have yet to flesh out details, but in previous public speeches, both senators have outlined changes that highlight the important role IT will play in the future of health care.

**Medicaid pilot projects under way**

Members of CHP worked with the legislature and the Division of Medical Services on the promotion of two pilot projects that would save Medicaid money and provide a better standard of care. The pilot projects passed muster with Governor Holden and are now in the process of being implemented.

Funding is now in place for a community-based care coordination pilot program for Medicaid patients with chronic illnesses and high-risk pregnancies that includes the use of an in-home electric monitor paired with contact by nurse managers. Additional funding is available in this budget cycle for Medicaid reimbursement for telehealth visits provided by University of Missouri physicians.
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On the web:
www.healthpolicy.missouri.edu

Save the date for policy summit and research forum

The Second Annual Missouri Health Policy Summit: This summit will be held at the Ramada Inn in Jefferson City, Mo., on Nov. 12, 2004. Two panels are scheduled for this year. The first will provide in-depth analysis of changes facing the state due to implementation of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003. The second panel will present recent data and policy recommendations of the state Advisory Council on the Affordability and Accessibility of Health Insurance Coverage. Panelists will include policy experts, state officials, legislators and other key stakeholders. Please visit http://www.healthpolicy.missouri.edu/summit/summit2004/summit2.htm for more specific information or to register for this year’s event.

Bridging the Quality Gap in Mid-America: Innovation and Improvement in Health Care Delivery:

The Center for Health Care Quality in collaboration with the Center for Health Policy will hold a research forum on April 21-22, 2005, at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Columbia. The conference is designed to disseminate both research and best practices designed to improve health care quality throughout the state and surrounding region. An announcement with more specific details about the call for presentations, registration and program information will be provided later this year.