

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthbeat

Medicare helps kick smoking habit

WASHINGTON (AP) — Medicare said last Thursday it intends to pay for counseling to help some of the nation's 4 million older smokers kick the habit.

Medicare beneficiaries who smoke and have smoking-related diseases or take certain medicines will be eligible for Medicare-covered counseling when the proposal takes effect next year. Medicare chief Mark McClellan said coverage would begin no later than the end of March.

Medicare would pay for up to four counseling sessions. If that doesn't suffice, smokers could get a second round of counseling.

Seffrin

The decision has broad support among health care providers and patient advocates, although some groups pushed for more extensive coverage, including for nicotine-replacement programs and some prescription drugs.

Medicare — the government health program for 42 million older and disabled Americans — will cover prescription medicines beginning in 2006.

"Quitting is hard, but counseling is a proven means of helping smokers succeed. It's cost effective and can double the chances of success," said John R. Seffrin, chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society.

Smoking is the top cause of preventable deaths in the United States, taking 440,000 lives a year, according to government estimates. Roughly 300,000 of those deaths occur among people 65 and older.

Tobacco use costs Medicare \$14 billion a year. Over 10 years, about 187,000 people would quit because of the counseling, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

The program would cost Medicare just over \$10 million a year, but savings in reduced health care costs would be greater than the cost over 10 years, the anti-smoking group said.

Ronald B. Mack, nationally recognized poisoning expert, died

Ronald B. Mack, M.D., professor of pediatrics, emeritus, at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, and a national expert on poisoning, died Dec. 22. He was 77.

Mack, who joined the faculty in 1975, wrote regular columns on poisoning both for Contemporary Pediatrics, a monthly national medical journal for pediatricians, and for the N.C. Medical Journal. For those columns, he received the 1987 Jesse H. Neal Editorial Achievement Award — a gold medal — from the Association of Business Publishers.

He also was editor of Poison Line, the bulletin of the American Association of Poison Control Centers, and associate editor of the accident prevention newsletter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Mack served for six years on the American Academy of Pediatrics committee on accident and poisoning prevention. He continued editing Poison Line even after he retired.

He was highly acclaimed as a teacher at what was then called Bowman Gray School of Medicine, winning the medical students' award for clinical teaching excellence in 1980, 1984, 1988 and 1995, and a record nine times from the physician assistant students. The medical students also dedicated the yearbook to him in 1986.

Most of his student contacts came as a faculty preceptor in pediatrics at Reynolds Health Center, the predecessor to Downtown Health Plaza.

Mack graduated from Loyola University of Chicago in 1950 with a bachelor of science degree and in 1954 from the Stritch School of Medicine of Loyola University with his medical degree. He did an internship at Cook County Hospital in 1954-55 and a residency in pediatrics at Mercy Hospital in Chicago from 1955-57.

He was in private practice in Berwyn, Ill., from 1957-1972, when he became academic director and chairman of the division of pediatrics at MacNeal Memorial Hospital and clinical associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Illinois-Chicago. He left those posts in 1975 to come to Bowman Gray.

Thompson awarded MAA Distinguished Service Award

James N. Thompson, M.D., president and CEO of the Federation of State Medical Boards in Dallas, Texas, received the Distinguished Service Award from the Wake Forest University School of Medicine Medical Alumni Association on Oct. 7.

Thompson was previously a member of the Wake Forest University School of Medicine faculty from 1979 to 2002, serving as dean of the medical school for seven years and vice president of Wake Forest University Health Sciences for four. Under his leadership, the school instituted a new curriculum, attained national rankings, achieved a perfect score during a Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) accreditation site visit and became a national model in integrating information technology into the curriculum.

Thompson earned his bachelor's degree at DePaul University and his medical degree at Ohio State University. He completed his internship and residency in otolaryngology at Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pa.

The Distinguished Service Award honors an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the medical center.



Dr. Thompson



Singing about surviving breast cancer, the 80 members of the Metropolitan Atlanta Breast Cancer Survivors Mass Choir spread their message of hope through songs of inspiration and love.

SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

Choir of breast cancer survivors makes joyful noise

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

"Staying free of cancer is certainly something worth singing about," said Carol Hagins, a married 56-year-old breast cancer survivor and mother of two. A native of New Jersey who now resides in Atlanta, Hagins joins her voice with 80 other breast cancer survivors in the Metropolitan Atlanta Breast Cancer Survivors Mass Choir to sing a message of inspiration to women with breast cancer.

Hagins said: "We've all been through the darkness and pain of breast cancer. We share that. But we also share the glory of healing, of enjoying a new life together. I'm not alone in fighting cancer. We're all surviving and singing about surviving together."

The mission of the choir is to uplift those surviving the disease, remember those lost to the disease, and prove there is life after a cancer diagnosis.

Through the choir, these breast cancer survivors — women 32 to 86 years old — have taken their message of hope and survival across the nation.

"We're always on the road these days," Hagins said. "For Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we were in Orlando. Then we went to Washington, D.C., for a fund-raiser for cancer research. From there, we're back home to sing the national anthem at the game between Atlanta Hawks vs. Miami Heat and to perform at the Atlanta Symphony Hall. We're already booked to sing here (Atlanta) for the lighting of the Christmas tree."

In December, the Metropolitan Atlanta Breast Cancer Survivors Mass Choir will perform in San Antonio, Texas.

"With all these performances, we're hoping to let black women and all women know that there's hope today. It's also a message I want to keep sharing with my son and daughter, because telling them I had breast cancer was without a doubt the most painful thing of all," Hagins said. "A diagnosis of breast cancer isn't a sign of death anymore. We sing about surviving and about living another day to sing."

Avon Foundation is a sponsor of the Metropolitan Atlanta Breast Cancer Survivors Mass Choir.

In her own words

Tips from survivor Carol Hagins:

- Do self-exam of your breasts every month. If you're menstruating, do it immediately after your period. If you're menopausal, choose the same day each month. When I had my period, I definitely had a routine. But, once I became menopausal, it was difficult to remember. So I finally chose one day — the 17th — on which to do my self-exam each and every month.
- Beginning at age 40, get a mammography every year.
- Follow up on results of self-exam or mammography. I didn't go back for a follow-up when my doctors first told me they saw something suspicious. They had told me that before and I never followed up in the past, so why do it now? That was a big mistake.
- Establish and maintain social connections with family, friends and organizations for support. If you tend to forget to do your self-exam or to get your mammogram, ask others to remind you.
- Remember you don't have to go through it alone. Ask for support. You'll be surprised at how many people will offer it to you.
- The more support you have, the better. My husband and daughter went with me for my chemotherapy treatments. My sister was a big support, always there to lift my spirits. And I could hardly wait for my chemotherapy to end, so that I could go to New Jersey, where I grew up, to be with my sister and other family and friends. Their continued support means so much.
- Seek the best treatment

See Tips on C4



File Photo

Some want to add points to driver's license for people who don't buckle up.

N.C. is looking for ways to get drivers to buckle up

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Officials are looking for ways to encourage more people to wear seat belts as the percentage of motorists buckling up on N.C. roads is leveling off.

"It's a tough problem," said Cliff Braam, a state highway safety engineer. "It's getting harder and harder. But it's something we need to figure out."

Recent statewide counts this year determined a steady 86 percent of people were wearing their seat belts — reaching a plateau after a consistently upward march from about 70 percent compliance in 1993.

At that time, the state began its "Click It or Ticket" educational and enforcement campaign. Drivers caught not wearing a seat belt can face fines.

"We're really struggling to get that last 12 percent to 15

percent to comply," said Eric Rodgman, a researcher at the Highway Safety Research Center at UNC Chapel Hill. "It's very challenging and, unfortunately, is very tough to crack."

Last year, 554 drivers and passengers were not wearing a seat belt when they were killed in crashes on N.C. highways — accounting for more than a third of all highway deaths in the state. While it's impossible

See Seat belts on C4

NCCU nursing professor is elected to NSS board

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

DURHAM — Yvonne Goolsby-Spencer, assistant to the chair of the department of nursing at N.C. Central University, was elected to the board of directors of the National Space Society (NSS) and assumed the chair of the education committee on Nov. 17.

The six-month election process culminated in the investiture of Spencer and the other board members at a meeting of the NSS in Huntsville, Ala.

The NSS is an international, citizen, nonprofit organization that believes the broad range of issues concerning the future exploration and habitation of space should not be left to America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration. With 75 chapters and more than 22,000 mem-



Goolsby-Spencer

See Board on C4