Pharmacists get more responsibility; nurses continue the fight

October 4, 2013 | By Zack Budryk

California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) this week signed a bill declaring that pharmacists are healthcare providers and authorizing them to provide further services, according to a statement released by the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP).

Senate Bill 493 addresses such services as preventative care, chronic disease management, medication therapy management, immunization delivery and wellness screenings.

The bill's passage positively impact both patients and providers, AMCP CEO Edith A. Rosato said in the statement. "Whenever pharmacists are allowed to provide additional health care services, patients win," Rosato said. "Outcomes are better and they're more satisfied with their care. The system overall benefits too--through lower costs, fewer drug related adverse events, and better access to care."

The AMCP lobbied Brown heavily on the bill, writing a letter in late September urging him to sign it.

Pharmacists' potential influence on outcomes and costs has been the subject of debate in the past. Proponents of expanding their scope of practice point to the role of medication mishaps in preventable readmissions, FierceHealthcare previously reported.

Brown's signature of the bill comes as Golden State nurses struggle for expanded roles. In September, the state legislature failed to advance a bill giving nurses the authority to operate without a supervising physician, according to California Healthline.

Proponents of the defeated bill pointed out that only 16 of California's 58 counties have the number of physicians recommended by the federal government. California Sen. Ed Hernandez (D), who sponsored both bills as well as one expanding optometrists' scope of practice, said he would reintroduce the bill next year, according to the article.

Meanwhile, a study published in July in Health Affairs found looser scope-of-practice laws for nurse practitioners (NPs) can blunt the impact of physician shortages. The largest increase in NPs serving as Medicare patients' primary care providers occurred in states where NPs had independent prescription authority, FierceHealthcare previously reported.

To learn more:
- here's the AMCP statement
- here's the letter (.pdf)
- here's the text of SB-493
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