The Changing Face of AIDS

Since its first appearance in the 1980s, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) has affected people of all ages. Although AIDS was initially considered an acute and fatal disease, advances in medicine and AIDS-specific research have increased the life expectancy for people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and AIDS. As a result, the disease is being managed as a chronic illness and the HIV-infected population is growing older. Data from MediMedia’s Hospital Diagnosis & Therapy Audit from 1999 to 2003 show a decrease in hospitalized HIV patients younger than age 40 and an increase in all hospitalized patients older than age 40 (Figure 1).

Most other demographic characteristics of inpatients with HIV infection have remained relatively unchanged. Men who are hospitalized with HIV still outnumber women by a 2-to-1 ratio (67% vs. 33%). The number of African-Americans with HIV infection represents twice the number of affected whites (69% vs. 26%).

The length of stay for HIV-infected inpatients rose slightly, from 7.5 days in 1999 to 8.3 days in 2003, but the median length of stay has stayed the same (five days).

There have also been changes in the types of primary insurance payers (Figure 2). The number of Medicare patients, which has been increasing since 2001, corresponds to the aging AIDS population. The spread of AIDS among low-income people has placed a growing burden on the Medicaid system. The exclusion of chronically ill or disabled individuals from managed care has caused decreases in this payer category and has elevated the number of patients who are financially responsible for their own health care costs.

In general, as new treatment options emerge, we can expect the HIV-infected population to live longer, to grow older, and to have a significant economic impact on the medical insurance industry.

REFERENCES

2. Hospital Diagnosis and Therapy Audit, 1999–2003. Yardley, PA: MediMedia USA.

The data cited herein are available free of charge to hospitals that participate in the PharmScope Insights program. This program specializes in helping hospital pharmacies target areas for performance improvement by providing benchmarks from a panel of 80 hospitals nationwide. For information about joining PharmScope Insights, a division of MediMedia USA, Inc., visit the Web site at www.mminfotech.com and click on Hospitals.