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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

From our CAL/AAEM official representative on the CAL/ACEP Governmental Affairs Committee (GAC)

**A Good Year Behind:
Many Challenges Are Already
Mounting Ahead
Shahram Lotfipour, MD
CAL/AAEM Vice President
January 2002**

This continues our CAL/AAEM official representative update on the CAL/ACEP Governmental Affairs Committee (GAC).

Our December report summarizes many important legislative updates. For more information on any of the bills listed, you can go to (<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html>).

❑ AB 3006 passed. This stopped a planned roll-back of the 40% increase in Medi-Cal reimbursement that emergency and on-call physicians had previously received over the last 2 years. This is great news, considering the huge state deficit and the considerable cuts in government spending that Governor Davis and the legislature have been planning and implementing across all state-sponsored programs. This happened with the help of your e-mails, calls, letters, and thanks to the lobbying efforts and leadership of the CMA and CAL/ACEP on this matter.

❑ State Budget Act Medi-Cal Provider Rate Cut: With our new state 2002 Budget Act on the books for a very short period of time, the Governor has recently announced a possible mid-year spending reduction proposal. This could include a 10% Medi-Cal provider rate cut that would impact all physicians including our specialists and practitioners.

❑ State Budget Act Medi-Cal Quarterly Eligibility Status Reports: Although the 2000 Budget Act had eliminated it, the reintroduction of this requirement for families is being reconsidered. If reinstated, it could cause 250,000 patients to lose their eligibility as of April 2003. This proposal should not affect the eligibility of children as they are excluded from this quarterly status report.

❑ Rescission of the 1931(b) Medi-Cal Eligibility Expansion: The administration proposes legislation to rescind the previous expansion of Medi-Cal to families up to 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The new legislation would make ineligible families above 61% of the FPL income. This would affect mostly two-income families and would reduce eligibility to 150,000 current patients.

At the national level, one important update that will unfortunately affect all emergency physicians is the recent decision by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to go forward with implementing a final rule it had previously announced "to update physician payment rates." Effectively, CMS will be reducing by 4.4% the Medicare physician fee schedule for 2003. The final rule will be effective March 1st. The American Hospital Association is leading an effort to urge Congress to take immediate action on payment relief for all providers (<http://www.aha.org>).

Due to the severe budget shortfall nationally and especially in Sacramento, I would encourage all of you to inform your patients, friends and the news media at every opportunity about the crisis in health care. With many potential budget cuts looming in the horizon, we will need all the positive reinforcement and organized effort we can put together. We cannot think of a more critical time in the last decade where we need your support and vigilance. Join our CAL/AAEM News Service to stay informed (at calaaem@aaem.org). Join us at the EM Legislative Leadership Conference (LLC) in Sacramento on March 5th, 2003 (www.calacep.org). Organized by CAL/ACEP, this outstanding program has the full support of CAL/AAEM. Contact us for further information or check the website. Registration is free. Of course, please continue providing the periodic support that we need to be heard in Sacramento and DC. Contact your legislators when we call for such action and, most importantly, please contribute to EMPAC, your state national Political Action Committee (PAC) Legislative Fund.

