Massachusetts seeks a new path to cut drug costs

by SHEFALI LUTHRA

Kaiser Health News

In the absence of new federal policies to tame the drug-price elephant, the Massachusetts Medicaid program wants to test a market-driven approach. It wants to let drug companies bid in a competitive discount already exists for drugs it purchases. They’re trying to take a step toward efficiency.

In federal health officials approve the plan, other states will probably see similar action. According to the most recent government data, Medicaid spending on prescription drugs increased about 25 percent in 2014 and nearly 14 percent in 2015. A big chunk of that increase is for the rising prices of specialty drugs.

The Medicaid program is required to cover almost all drugs that have received Food and Drug Administration approval, including drugs from other manufacturers that fall into the same category and are used for the same purpose. In exchange, manufacturers will discount those drugs — typically by a set percentage of the list price, as specified by federal law. The goal is for Medicaid to get the best prices it can because beneficiaries get medications they need without using up all their money.

As drug prices soar, states say, those fractional rebates no longer suffice to defray the burden of rising costs.

The program’s ultimate goal is to be able to apply to other genetic conditions including hemophilia and sickle cell disease.

The procedure, which took place a week ago at the University of California at San Francisco’s Benioff Children’s Hospital in Oakland, involved sending what the Associated Press described as “billions of copies of a corrective gene” to cut a defective DNA in a precise spot in the patient’s body. Those edits are designed to enable the patient, 14-year-old Brian Madeux, to produce an enzyme that would counteract a metabolic disease he suffers from known as Hunter syndrome.

Although there have been a few cases, no patient has been treated for this condition. The patient in the study, who is 5 years old, was treated in the same way to attempt to treat the disease.

Maceria said the Food and Drug Administration’s goal is to be able to treat children with the disease and that if it becomes approved, it will be applied to other genetic conditions including hemophilia and sickle cell disease.

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TEXAS

Authorities investigate death of border agent

Authorities are searching Texas’ Big Bend area for potential perpetrators and witnesses after a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent was killed while responding to activity there.

Border Patrol spokesman said they could not provide any details Sunday about what had happened.

Spokesman Carlos Díaz said the FBI has taken over the investigation.

Another spokesman, Douglas Moser, said that Rogelio Martinez, 36, and his partner were taken to a hospital, where Martinez died. Martinez’s partner is in serious condition. His name wasn’t released.

Martinez had been a border agent since August 2013 and was from El Paso.

— Associated Press

NEW YORK

Santa appointments for Macy’s visitors

Santa Claus may be coming to town, but you’ll need a reservation to see him.

At the Macy’s flagship store on 34th Street in New York, a chance to sit on Saint Nick’s lap is by appointment only this year, for the first time.

Starting Monday, people can sign up online for a time slot from 30 minutes to five days in advance. No walk-ins are allowed. Admission is free. Santaland Herald Square will be open from the day after Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve. Macy’s said the new arrangement is intended to reduce wait times.

— Associated Press

Ohio high court justice apologizes again: An Ohio Supreme Court justice and Democratic gubernatorial candidate has issued another apology on Facebook after a post Friday outlining his sexual history with women drew condemnation.

In his latest post Sunday morning, William O’Neill said that he was wrong and that he was headed to church to “get right with God.”

He apologized to his daughters and sisters and says he realizes he has hurt family members, friends and strangers with his “insensitive remarks” while damming the national debate about sexual harassment and abuse. O’Neill deleted his original post from Friday.

Children involved in shooting in Minn.: Authorities in western Minnesota say a 5-year-old was accidentally shot and wounded by another child. The Otter Tail County Sheriff’s Office said it received a 911 call about the shooting from a home in Deer Creek about 7:30 a.m. Sunday.

The caller reported that a 5-year-old had caused the injury.

— From news services