

HR Focus

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Did You Know?

Buried within the fine print of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act are at least a handful of policies designed to – drum roll please – improve public health. Here's a rundown on a few of them:

Calorie Counts

Chain restaurants – those with 20 or more locations – must disclose calorie counts and other nutritional information about the food they sell. In addition to the "nutrient content disclosure statement" for each standard menu item, the restaurant must also have guidelines on average daily calorie intake.

The comparison is "designed to enable the public to understand, in the context of a total daily diet, the significance of the caloric information that is provided on the menu," the Act states. The hope is that consumers will make healthier choices if they know the amount of fat and calories contained in the items the order.

Many restaurants already post this information. New York City, Seattle, the state of California and others have already adopted similar laws. The federal law provides uniformity.

Tanning Tax

A 10-percent tax on indoor tanning services has gained the ire of the tanning bed industry. The rule, which goes into effect July 1, has been criticized as potentially bad for small businesses.

Meanwhile, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), which advocates a wholesale ban on indoor tanning, says reduced use of tanning beds will ultimately save lives and reduce the cost of treating skin cancer. In pointing out that melanoma is the most common form of cancer in people aged 25-29, the AAD calls the tax "good public health policy."

Pregnant Smokers?

Medicare will now cover drugs and counseling to help pregnant women quit smoking. Experts have long believed that smoking during pregnancy puts unborn children at risk for asthma, ear infections and other health problems.

Nursing Moms

Employers will be required to provide "reasonable break time" and a location other than a rest room for nursing mothers to express breast milk. Nursing mothers should be accommodated for up to one year after their child is born.