Dermatologists are used to jumping the hurdles of all sorts of regulations, and as we enter into 2014 facing a new batch of rules, we know that adjustments—and frustrations—are par for the course. We’ll surely search for bright spots in the Sunshine Act (the problem is not the reporting so much as patient perception and possible misunderstanding) or struggle to find meaning in Meaningful Use, which is unfairly being used to assess fitfulness for practice (see the story in the October edition at PracticalDermatology.com). In addition, we’ll continue to navigate the mammoth Affordable Care Act—along with our patients—and carefully watch for adjustments.

As we do every year, we also now look ahead to looming pay cuts from CMS, thanks to the flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) that is used to calculate payments. Congress will probably enact a fix, but we’re faced with underpayment until they do. It’s ironic that the government is so interested in enhancing the efficiency of medical care through EMR incentives, physician rating efforts, etc., yet the costly and inefficient SGR game plays out year after year without lawmakers implementing a long-term fix.

There may be a bright spot in medical practice for us in dermatology, however. It seems that the pace of drug innovation is relatively healthy for dermatologic or related conditions. FDA drug approvals hit a new high in 2012, with a total of 39 novel medicines approved. This compares to an average of 23 per year in the preceding 10 years.

Novel approvals this year currently number just 26. While FDA isn’t on pace to outdo itself in 2013, we will be prescribing a number of 2013’s novel agents, and the pipeline is promising, as well. You can read about recent approvals and promising investigational agents in the pages ahead. While psoriasis and skin cancer remain high-level targets for drug developers, we are seeing new developments in rosacea, acne, and atopic dermatitis, as well.

Innovation isn’t limited to the realms of drugs. We have new medical and cosmetic devices, new filler agents, and new OTC agents at our disposal or on the horizon.

As physicians, we face many challenges, but these are counterbalanced by enhanced ability to meaningfully impact the health and quality of life of our patients. Let’s hope the coming year brings additional therapeutic innovations—and a break in all the regulations wouldn’t hurt either.

—Joseph Bikowski, MD, FAAD
Chief Medical Editor