

Federal Health Update

MARCH 10, 2017

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **On March 9, 2017, the House passed H.R. 1301, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2017.**

According to the House Appropriations news release, the bill closely reflects the Defense Appropriations bill the House passed last summer, and is consistent with the final National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017.

In total, the bill provides \$577.9 billion, an increase of \$5.2 billion over the fiscal year 2016 enacted level and \$1.6 billion more than the Obama Administration's request.

For a bill summary, please visit:

<http://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=394777>

For text of the legislation, please

visit: https://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/03.02.17_defense_-_fy_2017_appropriations_bill.pdf

- **On March 9, 2017, the House Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means Committees approved legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with House Speaker Paul Ryan's the American Health Care Act.**

So far the American Hospital Association, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the

Catholic Health Association of the United States, the Children's Hospital Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Medical Association and AARP, said they didn't support the bill.

For a section-by-section of the Energy and Commerce legislation, click [here](#).

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Army Chief of Staff announced the following general officer assignments:**

Brig. Gen. R. Scott Dingle to be commanding general, Regional Health Command-Atlantic, Fort Belvoir, Va. Dingle was deputy chief of staff, operations, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army Medical Command, Falls Church, Va.

Brig. Gen. Ronald J. Place to be special assistant to the commanding general, U.S. Army Medical Command/The Surgeon General, U.S. Army, Falls Church, Va. Place was commanding general, Regional Health Command-Atlantic, Fort Belvoir, Va.

- **Military Health System leaders visited several medical research and clinical training facilities Nigeria, Liberia and Ghana to strengthen important biosurveillance and clinical response capabilities.**

As part of the [Joint West Africa Research Group](#) (JWARG), Dr. Chris Daniel, senior advisor for Global Health Engagement in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, and Dr. David J. Smith, who is performing the duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, took the opportunity to meet with military and public health leaders in each nation to discuss how to continue the momentum of recent successes.

The value of health as a tool for building bridges with partner militaries was clear throughout the trip. In Nigeria, the team saw how valuable international efforts have been to the Nigerian people in combating HIV-AIDS. In Liberia, they toured a liquid nitrogen production and storage facility provided by JWARG that supports advanced biomedical research. And in Ghana, medical leadership within the Ghanaian Armed Forces expressed enthusiasm for continued research collaboration.

JWARG was formed in response to gaps in global public health preparedness and responsiveness, highlighted by the 2014-15 West African Ebola outbreak. The program builds upon local partnerships previously established in the three host nations by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, the Naval Medical Research Center, and the Ghana Detachment of Naval Medical Research Unit-3. These organizations, along with a number of other military, government, and academic institutions, now collaborate to improve pandemic responsiveness across the West African region.

JWARG members work together on a number of initiatives focused on laboratory and clinical strengthening, biosurveillance, and countermeasure development. The program has already conducted an expansive set of training programs in the U.S. and West Africa on clinical management of diseases, genomics, diagnostics, chemistry, hematology, and other medical topics particularly relevant for promoting regional and global health security.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin while testifying in a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on March 7, 2017, announced his intention to expand**

provisions for urgent mental health care needs to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges.

This move marks the first time a VA Secretary has implemented an initiative specifically focused on expanding access to assist former OTH service members who are in mental health distress and may be at risk for suicide or other adverse behaviors.

It is estimated that there are a little more than 500,000 former service members with OTH discharges. As part of the proposal, former OTH service members would be able to seek treatment at a VA emergency department, Vet Center or contact the Veterans Crisis Line.

Before finalizing the plan in early summer, Shulkin will meet with Congress, veterans service organizations and Department of Defense officials to determine the best way forward to get these former service members the care they need.

Veterans in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **On March 7, 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released findings from its National Health Interview Survey for the adults with arthritis and arthritis-related activity limitations data.**

According to the findings, more than 54 million adults in the US have it. That's about 1 in 4 US adults who have arthritis. Almost 60 percent, or about 32 million, of those with arthritis are of working age (ages 18-64).

Symptoms can be reduced with physical activity and educational programs. When people with arthritis engage in physical activity they can reduce their arthritis symptoms by up to 40 percent. Adults with arthritis also can reduce their symptoms by participating in disease management education programs.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published "Veterans' Health Care: Preliminary Observations on Veterans' Access to Choice Program Care," (GAO-17-397T) on March 7, 2017.** This study examines the VA's process for scheduling Choice Program appointments for routine care; and what is known about the timeliness of veterans' Choice Program appointments for routine care and urgent care. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/683205.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on **March 22, 2017**, to examine the legislative presentations of multiple veterans service organizations.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.1409** (introduced March 7, 2017): To amend the Public Health Service Act to require group

and individual health insurance coverage and group health plans to provide for cost sharing for oral anticancer drugs on terms no less favorable than the cost sharing provided for anticancer medications administered by a health care provider was referred to House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Leonard Lance [R-NJ-7]

- **H.R.1408** (introduced March 7, 2017): To repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the health care-related provisions in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 and to amend title 5, United States Code, to offer Federal employee health benefits plans to individuals who are not Federal employees, and for other purposes was referred to House Rules. Sponsor: Representative Darrell E. Issa [R-CA-49]
- **S.530** (introduced March 6, 2017): A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to disclose to non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers certain medical records of veterans who receive health care from such providers was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Sponsor: Senator Joe Manchin, III [D-WV]
- **H.R.1375** (introduced March 7, 2017): To amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize the Secretary of Health of Human Services to award grants to States (or collaborations of States) to establish, expand, or maintain a comprehensive regional, State, or municipal system to provide training, education, consultation, and other resources to prescribers relating to patient pain, substance misuse, and substance abuse disorders, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Katherine M. Clark [D-MA-5]
- **H.R.1371** (introduced March 6, 2017): To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to disclose to non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers certain medical records of veterans who receive health care from such providers was referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Sponsor: Representative Beto O'Rourke [D-TX-16]
- **H.R.1433** (introduced March 8, 2017): To amend title 10, United States Code, to expand preventive health care services under the TRICARE program was referred to the House Committee on Armed Services. Sponsor: Representative Salud O. Carbajal [D-CA-24]

MEETINGS

- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 4, 2017**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org>
- The 7th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held **May 24-25, 2017**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>

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