

Federal Health Update

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **The House and Senate will be in recess until April 14, 2015.**
- **On April 7, 2015, President Obama announced his intent to nominate Gabriel Camarillo to be the next assistant secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.**

Camarillo is the principal deputy assistant secretary of the Army for Acquisitions, Logistics & Technology (AL&T), a position he has held since 2012. From 2010 to 2012, Mr. Camarillo served as special assistant to the assistant secretary of the Army for AL&T. Since 2011, Mr. Camarillo has been an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy. Mr. Camarillo began his legal career as an Associate at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. Mr. Camarillo received a B.A. from Georgetown University and a J.D. from Stanford Law School.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **A new research report sponsored by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury confirms what many in the military have long suspected: service members don't get nearly enough sleep.**

About a third of military members get by on five hours of sleep a night or less, and another third only manage six hours a night. Only 8 percent of civilians get by on five hours of sleep or less, as measured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study, conducted by Rand Corp., reported that almost half of service members said they sleep poorly, compared to about a third of the general population. And sleep problems occur at the same rate throughout the military, regardless of whether or not people are deployed.

More than 18 percent of those surveyed reported using sleep aids such as sleeping pills, which have side effects that present a safety risk in an operational setting.

The study confirms that lack of sleep can have serious consequences for brain function and psychological health. Resilience, emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships are impaired by sleep deficiency. The survey analysis supports a link between sleep quantity and quality, and physical health problems, such as obesity, and reports that sleep problems are a risk factor for depression and posttraumatic stress disorder.

According to the survey, a third of service members feel fatigued at least three to four times a week, and 17 percent reported that lack of sleep impairs their ability to function.

The report recommends the Defense Department take steps to prevent sleep problems, increase identification and diagnosis of sleep problems, clinically manage sleep disorders and promote sleep health, and improve sleep in training and operational contexts. The full text can be found on the [Rand website](#).

- **The Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are pledging to do more to help warfighters face the challenge of resuming a normal life after a long time spent in combat zones. Part of that challenge can be coping with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental illnesses.**

Combined, DoD and VA have spent more than \$1.5 billion during the past six years for psychiatric treatment, counseling and the development of peer-help groups to assist service members who need care for mental illness. Both agencies are committed to doing even more.

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Dr. Jonathan Woodson, and Sloan Gibson, deputy secretary of Veterans Affairs, recently spoke about these efforts at a mental health awareness campaign launch in downtown Washington, D.C.

“PTSD is an issue we are taking head on,” Woodson said. “We realize that we need to devote more resources moving forward with many veterans returning home to their families and communities.”

An important step is to build awareness and that’s why an initiative such as the Campaign to Change Direction is necessary. The campaign is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Give an Hour, a nonprofit organization with a network of 7,000 mental health professionals who provide free services to veterans. The campaign is designed to change the story of mental health across the nation by urging all Americans to learn the five signs that someone might be in distress. They are: personality change, agitation, withdrawal, poor self-care, hopelessness. SAMHSA will provide subject matter expertise and coordinate federal outreach through DoD, VA and the Department of Health and Human Services.

“MHS is pleased to lend its support to the Change Direction Initiative, in order to increase awareness and subsequent treatment for service members who suffer from PTSD and other mental illnesses,” said Woodson.

- **The U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine launched a collaborative research study with Tufts University to assess the effectiveness of two weight-loss strategies.**

Called "*Healthy Families, Healthy Forces*," this randomized trial will measure the effectiveness of two weight-loss programs for meaningful and sustainable weight loss in military families.

The study targets dependents of active-duty military personnel and addresses the eating environment at the soldier's home. This two-year study, which is based on Tufts University's innovative "Healthy Weight for Living Program," began in January 2015 and features group classes that provide free education and support to help family members lose weight and prevent weight regain. These classes will be a fun way to learn menu planning, grocery shopping, self-monitoring of weight, diet and activity.

Many times military families just do not know where to start when it comes to healthy eating and quick weight-loss programs can often be expensive and frustrating, with no real long-term benefits. This program focuses on changing behaviors in an environment that connects military families to one another.

If this study is successful in the Boston area, where it is currently taking place, researchers would like to scale it up to the rest of the military community nationwide so weight-loss programs are consistent on all installations.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Associated Press reports that Veteran Affairs statistics show that the number of veterans facing long waits to see a doctor has not declined over the past year, even with the \$16.3 billion additional funds it received last summer.**

According to government data reviewed by AP, nearly 894,000 appointments completed at VA medical facilities from Aug. 1 to Feb. 28 failed to meet the health system's timeliness goal, which calls for patients to be seen within 30 days. More than a quarter of those appointments involved a delay of longer than 60 days.

Since the summer, the number of vets waiting more than 30 or 60 days for non-emergency care has largely stayed flat. The number of medical appointments that take longer than 90 days to complete has nearly doubled.

The AP noted that much of the delays occurred in many southern states. Of the 75 clinics and hospitals with the highest percentage of patients waiting more than 30 days for care, 12 are in Tennessee or Kentucky, 11 are in eastern North Carolina and the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, 11 are in Georgia or southern Alabama and six are in north Florida. Seven more were clustered in the region between Albuquerque, New Mexico and Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Those 47 clinics and hospitals represent just a fraction of the more than 1,000 VA facilities nationwide, but they were responsible for more than one in five of the appointments that took longer than 60 days to complete.

The AP examined six months of appointment data at 940 individual VA facilities to gauge changes since a scandal over delays led to the resignation of the VA's secretary and prompted lawmakers in August to give the VA an additional \$16.3 billion to hire doctors, open more clinics and build the new Choice program that allows patients facing long delays to get private-sector care. Data for individual facilities were not available for August.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Institute of Medicine announced that Margaret A. (Peggy) Hamburg, former commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, has been appointed as the next foreign secretary of the Institute of Medicine, the health arm of the National Academy of Sciences.**

In this part-time position, Hamburg will serve as a senior adviser on international matters to the IOM president and council and as liaison to foreign academies of medicine and science. Her term begins on April 6 and is effective through June 30, 2019. Hamberg succeeds Jo Ivey Boufford, president of the New York Academy of Medicine. As IOM engagement in matters of health that extend beyond the United States continues to expand, so does the importance of the foreign secretary's role.

- **According to the *The Sacramento Bee* California lawmakers approved a bill this week that would prevent most parents from opting out of vaccinations for their children enrolled in school, just months after the state was hit with the largest U.S. measles outbreak in decades.**

The measure, which passed by 6-2, must go through several additional hearings before a potential vote on the state Senate floor.

The bill, which was drafted in response to recent outbreaks of preventable diseases like measles and whooping cough, eliminates the "personal beliefs" exemption that currently allows parents in California to not vaccinate their children before enrolling in public or private school.

Public health officials point to extensive research showing vaccines protect the common good and that adverse side effects are rare. The debate about vaccines was renewed earlier this year when a measles outbreak originated at an amusement park in California, ultimately affecting hundreds of people in nearly two dozen states.

Since January, 159 people from at least 18 states and Washington, D.C., were reported to have measles, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The multi-state outbreak began last December when at least 40 people who visited or worked at Disneyland in Orange County earlier that month contracted the disease. Hundreds of other people were isolated or tracked during the incubation period, in case they developed the highly contagious and potentially deadly disease.

The recent outbreak occurred 15 years after it was determined that vaccination had eradicated homegrown measles. Much of the outbreak occurred in the California area, where immunization rates have been falling for years as parents frequently choose not to immunize their children. People who are vaccinated against measles are immune and cannot contract the virus, helping create what scientists call "herd immunity." But when the overall immunization rate drops below a certain level, the disease can gain a foothold, particularly among vulnerable populations like babies (who are too young to receive the measles vaccine) and the elderly.

- **Teen births continue to decline in the U.S., but still more than 273,000 infants were born to teens ages 15 to 19 in 2013.**

Data show that teens most often use condoms and birth control pills which, when not used consistently and correctly, are less effective for preventing pregnancy. According to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, increasing access to Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) is one way to further reduce teen pregnancy.

LARC – intrauterine devices (IUDs) and implants – is the most effective type of reversible birth control. LARC is safe to use, does not require taking a pill every day or doing something every time before having sex, and, depending on the method, can be used to prevent pregnancy for three to 10 years. Less than one percent of LARC users become pregnant during the first year of use. Major professional societies, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), have endorsed LARC as a first-line contraceptive choice for teens. LARC by itself does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases.

The report calls attention to barriers for teens who might consider LARC, including:

- Many teens know very little about LARC.
- Some mistakenly think they cannot use LARC because of their age.
- Clinics also report barriers to providing LARC to teens, including:
 - High upfront costs for supplies exist for some providers.
 - Providers may have misplaced concerns about the safety and appropriateness of LARC for teens.
 - Providers may lack training on insertion and removal.

The reported barriers to LARC use prompted CDC and the Office of Population Affairs (OPA), both within the Department of Health and Human Services, to analyze patterns in LARC use among teens ages 15-19 seeking contraceptive services, using 2005-2013 data from the [Title X National Family Planning program](#). This federally funded grant program supports confidential family planning and related preventive services with priority for low-income clients and teens.

May is Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. This report was created to help the nation's communities continue the dialogue about teen pregnancy and its health and social consequences for youth.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- There were no relevant reports published this week.

HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **April 15, 2015**, to examine the promise and progress of the Choice Program/
- The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will hold a hearing on **April 16, 2015**, to examine proposed budget estimates and justification for fiscal year 2016 for military construction and military family housing for select combatant commanders and select defense agencies.
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **April 30, 2015**, to examine access and quality of care and services for women veterans

LEGISLATION

- There was no legislation proposed this week.

MEETINGS

- The HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition will be held on **April 12-16, 2015**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.himssconference.org/>
- The 5th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held **April 15-16, 2015**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>
- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 7, 2015**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org/heroes-dinner>
- 2015 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting - The Society Of The Federal Health Professionals will be held on **Dec. 1-4, 2015**, in San Antonio, Texas. <http://amsusmeetings.org/annual-meeting/>

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