

# Federal Health Update

APRIL 13, 2018

*Welcome to Federal Health Update. This newsletter is a compilation of the latest news in the federal health care sector.*

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## EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- House Speaker Paul Ryan announced he would not seek re-election in 2018.

## MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **U.S. Navy Deputy Surgeon General, Rear Adm. Terry J. Moulton, signed the Long-Term Opioid Therapy Safety Program instruction, establishing policies and training designed to ensure the safety of long-term opioid therapy patients.**

New and existing long-term opioid therapy patients with a projected course of therapy of 90-days or longer are now required to undergo a psychiatric and substance abuse history screening. The screening includes an assessment of active thoughts of suicide, and risk of opioid abuse. Patients must also establish an informed consent and opioid care agreement with their clinician. The consent provides information on the risks and benefits of therapy.

Additional requirements, including urinalysis, are mandated prior to and throughout therapy to ensure the treatment is still effective and there are no signs of opioid abuse.

Navy Medicine is taking several steps to limit opioid prescriptions by educating patients and clinicians on alternative pain management methods. These methods include alternative pain medications, physical therapy, lifestyle changes, chiropractic massage therapy, acupuncture and

sometimes surgery. The goal, said Cmdr. Ian Fowler, Navy Medicine Pain Specialty Leader, is to use non-pharmacological approaches to mitigate the risks of opioid use for patients with chronic pain by balancing self-care, primary care, specialty care, integrative therapies and medication.

For more information about the Long-Term Opioid Therapy Safety Program, please visit: <http://www.med.navy.mil/directives/ExternalDirectives/6320.101.pdf>.

- **The Military Health System Nurse Advice Line (MHS NAL), a service available to TRICARE beneficiaries living in the U.S. and Europe since 2014, is now available to those living in Japan and South Korea.**

The MHS NAL allows you to speak with a registered nurse 24/7 for no cost. A registered nurse will help you choose the right level of care for yourself, your child or other family member, schedule military hospital or clinic appointments, and much more. If you are enrolled to a military hospital or clinic, the MHS NAL will send a note to your patient-centered medical home team to let them know how you're doing. If a health concern arises and your local hospital or clinic is closed or if you are not sure whether your health concern warrants a visit to a health care provider, you now have the option to call the MHS NAL.

In Japan, you can reach the MHS NAL at 0066-33-821820. In South Korea, you can reach the MHS NAL from DSN by dialing 94-888-901-7144 or 888-901-7144. The MHS NAL toll-free number for South Korea is coming soon.

The MHS NAL is not for emergencies. If you have an emergency, contact your local emergency medical service or go to the closest emergency room or emergency care facility.

The new MHS NAL Beneficiary Portal also gives you the option to discuss your health concerns with a registered nurse in a secure web chat or video chat.

The next time you need help making immediate decisions about your health needs, remember that the MHS NAL is just a phone call or click away. Learn more about MHS NAL.

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has deployed the Centralized Benefits Communications Management Program (CBCM) nationally.**

The program represents a new centralized printing and mailing process system designed to improve productivity and streamline correspondence with Veterans on compensation benefits and pension burial claims.

Prior to CBCM, which went into effect March 23, VBA's 56 regional offices were responsible individually for their manual processing of outbound mail.

Under CBCM, claims processors across the country now submit letters electronically to one central location for printing and distribution — allowing specialized employees to focus more time and energy assessing Veteran claims.

In addition to improving productivity, CBCM also will help reduce maintenance requirements of hundreds of regional office printers, reduce the likelihood of returned mail through additional address verification and enhance the security and privacy of Veteran information through minimized handling of mail.

Over the past five years, VA has improved the way it processes compensation and pension

claims enabling the development of CBCM. In the future, VA will enhance CBCM's design to improve further VBA's methods of communication with Veterans by allowing them to choose between paper or digital correspondence. For more information or questions about CBCM, email [VAPublicAffairs@va.gov](mailto:VAPublicAffairs@va.gov)

- **To honor and support Veterans welcoming new children into their families in 2018, 60 Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMC) around the country will host baby showers between May 5-16, the weeks surrounding Mother's Day, in partnership with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation.**

The Nationwide Baby Shower will ensure veterans have what they need to focus on the joy of growing their families in those stressful first weeks, increasing awareness of VA's comprehensive maternity care services and to encourage women veterans to choose VA to support their health and wellness goals.

Women make up approximately 10 percent of the veteran population in the United States, and nearly half of the nation's 2 million women veterans are of reproductive age. VA offers comprehensive primary care, prenatal and preconception (pre-pregnancy) care, infertility services, maternity care services and the first seven days of newborn care.

The [Elizabeth Dole Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization that advocates for military caregivers, is expanding its existing relationship with VA by aiding in welcoming the newest caregivers to the veteran community through local support and volunteer efforts at each baby shower location. [Philips](#), the [veteran Canteen Service](#) and other partners are also supporting this initiative, which will provide new Veteran parents with items to help new parents and babies.

More than 2,400 new veteran parents and new veteran parents-to-be will be recognized at the events. At least one VAMC in every Veterans Integrated Service Network is participating. All 60 sites can be found here: <https://www.va.gov/womenvet/acwv/babyShower.asp>.

For more information about VA's benefits and services for women veterans, as well as the Nationwide Baby Shower, visit [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet).

## GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II announced the following appointments for the Department:**

**Judy Stecker to be assistant secretary for public affairs.** Prior to joining HHS, Stecker served as executive director of media relations and strategic marketing for American Enterprise Institute (AEI). Stecker also served as senior media associate for broadcast services at the Heritage Foundation.

**Jeff Rosenberg to be principal deputy assistant secretary for public affairs.** Rosenberg has more than 30 years of providing high-level strategic communications guidance to government agencies and leading nonprofit organizations and foundations. Before joining HHS, he served as an executive vice president at Crosby Marketing Communications, directing major integrated communications programs. Prior to this position, Rosenberg served as the president and owner of Rosenberg Communications, his own firm, a full-service communications practice.

**HHS Deputy General Counsel Heather Flick has been named the acting assistant secretary for administration.** Flick started with the HHS as deputy general counsel, was promoted to principal deputy general counsel; and served as acting general counsel until the General Counsel Robert Charrow was confirmed by the Senate.

**Adam Boehler to be deputy administrator and director of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Innovation (CMMI).** Boehler is the former CEO and founder of Landmark Health, a company focused on delivering medical services to the most chronically ill patients. Boehler also is the founder of Avalon Health Solutions, a leading provider of laboratory benefit management services in the country.

- **The Food and Drug Administration finalized two guidances to drive the efficient development of a novel technology that scans a person’s DNA to diagnose genetic diseases, which are usually hereditary, and guide medical treatments.**

The guidances provide recommendations for designing, developing and validating tests that use the technology, called next generation sequencing (NGS), and will play an important role in the continued advancement of individualized, genetic-based medicine.

NGS works by looking at a person’s DNA to detect genomic variations that may determine whether a person has or is at risk of developing a genetic disease and, in certain cases, may help to inform treatment decisions. Unlike traditional diagnostics that typically detect chemical changes associated with a single disease or condition, NGS can look at millions of DNA changes in a single test to help determine the cause of a person’s disease or condition. Availability of these types of tests plays an important role in the advancement of the field of precision medicine.

- The first guidance issued, “[Use of Public Human Genetic Variant Databases to Support Clinical Validity for Genetic and Genomic-Based In Vitro Diagnostics](#),” describes an approach where test developers may rely on clinical evidence from FDA-recognized public databases to support clinical claims for their tests and help provide assurance of the accurate clinical evaluation of genomic test results. The guidance describes how product developers can use these databases to support the clinical validation of NGS tests that they are developing. These public databases may include resources like ClinGen, which is maintained by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Using FDA-recognized databases will provide test developers with an efficient path for marketing clearance or approval of a new test.
- The second guidance issued, “[Considerations for Design, Development, and Analytical Validation of Next Generation Sequencing \(NGS\)–Based In Vitro Diagnostics \(IVDs\) Intended to Aid in the Diagnosis of Suspected Germline Diseases](#),” provides recommendations for designing, developing, and validating NGS-based tests used to diagnose individuals with suspected genetic diseases. It describes what the FDA would look for in premarket submissions to determine a test’s analytical validity, including how well the test detects the presence or absence of a particular genomic change.

As NGS technologies continue to evolve, the FDA remains dedicated to adapting our regulatory review capabilities and leveraging our authorities to the fullest extent in order to make innovative and accurate testing technologies available to patients as efficiently as possible.

## REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Community-Based Outpatient Clinics,” (GAO-18-375) on April 12, 2018.** In the report, the review VHA's use of contracts to carry out core functions. This report examines, among other issues, the extent to which VHA oversees CBOC operations.  
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/691221.pdf>

- **The GAO published “Improved Guidance and Oversight Needed for the Patient Advocacy Program,” (GAO-18-356) on April 12, 2018.** This report examines the extent to which VHA has provided guidance on the governance of the program; provided guidance on staffing the program; assessed the training needs of patient advocates and monitored training completion; and monitored patient advocacy program data-entry practices and reviewed program data. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/691244.pdf>

## HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing on **April 17, 2018**, to examine the health care legislation.
- The House Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **April 19, 2018**, to examine Military Health System Reform: Pain Management, Opioids Prescription Management and Reporting Transparency.
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **May 16, 2018**, to hear testimony and proposals from VA.

## LEGISLATION

- **H.R.5456** (introduced April 10, 2018): To amend the Public Health Service Act to authorize grants to health centers to expand access to evidence-based substance abuse treatment services was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Rosa L. DeLauro [D-CT-3]
- **S.2636** (introduced April 10, 2018): A bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a community action opioid response grant program was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Sponsor: Senator Susan M. Collins [R-ME]
- **S.2642** (introduced April 10, 2018): A bill to require the Secretary of Labor, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to establish a pilot program for Jobs Plus Recovery programs, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Sponsor: Senator Tim Kaine [D-VA]
- **H.R.5473** (introduced April 10, 2018): To direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to update or issue one or more guidances, addressing alternative methods for data collection on opioid sparing and inclusion of such data in product labeling, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Barbara Comstock [R-VA-10]

## MEETINGS

- 2018 Heroes of Military Medicine Awards Dinner will be held on **May 3, 2018**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org/heroes-dinner/>
- The 8th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held on **May 16-17, 2018**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>

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