

Federal Health Update

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

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ktheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **On April 19, 2016, President Obama signed into law:**
 - S. 483, the “Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016,” which amends the Controlled Substances Act to: define "imminent danger to public health or safety" for the purposes of an immediate suspension or revocation by the Department of Justice (DOJ) of a registration to manufacture, distribute, or dispense controlled substances; and provide registrants with the opportunity to submit a corrective action plan prior to a determination by DOJ to deny or revoke a registration; and
 - S. 2512, the “Adding Zika Virus to the FDA Priority Review Voucher Program Act,” which adds Zika virus to the Food and Drug Administration priority review voucher program to encourage the development of treatments for neglected tropical diseases.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Secretary of Defense Ash Carter has announced Dr. Richard Thomas has been selected as the next president of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland.**

Thomas is a retired Army major general who recently served as the first director of health care operations for the Defense Health Agency upon its establishment on Oct. 1, 2013. The current

president, Dr. Charles L. Rice, will step down from his role on June 30, 2016, after leading the university since July 2005.

- **The Defense Health Agency announced that the limits to in-patient psychiatric care have been removed.**

The in-patient psychiatric hospitalization benefit was limited to 30 days per benefit year for adults and 45 days for children or adolescents. You could request a waiver for additional treatment days if needed. Now however, inpatient mental health hospital services, regardless of length or quantity, may be covered as long as the care is considered medically or psychologically necessary and appropriate. Likewise, the psychiatric partial hospitalization benefit previously had a 60 day per benefit year limitation that could be extended with a waiver. This 60 day limitation has been removed to ensure that beneficiaries receive care for as long as needed.

In addition, the 150 day limit on residential treatment care for beneficiaries under 21 has been removed. Although medical determination is still required, there is no day limit.

If emergency care is required, beneficiaries can get emergency psychiatric care without pre-authorization. However, you one must get authorization within 72 hours of admission and the 72 hours starts the day after admission.

Medical or surgical care does not and has not historically had day limits on care. Now, thanks to the federal mental health parity law, which requires that mental health benefits be equal to medical or surgical healthcare benefits, the same is also true for mental health care. For more information about [mental health coverage](#), visit the TRICARE website.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **On April 20, 2016, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald, three-time Olympic gold medalist swimmer Nancy Hogshead-Makar and former NFL player and Super Bowl champion Phil Villapiano, have pledged to donate their brains to advance brain research conducted by VA in partnership with the Concussion Legacy Foundation.**

The announcement was made at the VA-hosted Brain Trust: Pathways to InnoVAtion, a public-private partner event which builds on the trailblazing efforts of a number of distinguished VA brain researchers and brings together many of the most influential voices in the field of brain health to identify and advance solutions for mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank is directed by Dr. Ann McKee and is located at the Bedford VA Medical Center. It is now the largest sports mTBI and CTE repository in the world with over 325 brains donated, and over a thousand more pledged.

Brain Trust: Pathways to InnoVAion is a two-day public-private partnership event hosted by VA. As the largest, integrated health care system in the country, VA is using its convening authority to bring together many of the most influential voices in the field of brain health – to include the Department of Defense, the sports industry, private sector, federal government, Veterans and community partners - to identify and advance solutions for mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Issues related to brain health and head trauma transcend the Veteran and military community, impacting all Americans. By highlighting the themes of collaborative research, medical technology, and sports innovation for player safety, Brain Trust participants are discussing the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of Veterans, athletes, and

Americans in general - suffering from head trauma related injuries. The event will also serve as a showcase for many of the advancements that VA is pioneering to improve brain health for Veterans, the military and for the American public at large.

In addition to many of the world's most accomplished brain research scientists, Brain Trust attendees include sports commentator Bob Costas, Gen. Peter Chiarelli (CEO of One Mind, and the former Vice Chief of Staff of the Army), Briana Scurry (former U.S. Women's Soccer Player), Jeanne Marie Laskas (author of the *GQ* article that inspired the movie "Concussion"), Terry O'Neil (16-time Emmy award winner), representatives from the NFL Players Association, the NFL, the NCAA, DARPA, DOD, NIH, CDC, and many more.

For more information on donating to the VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank or to get involved, go to: <http://concussionfoundation.org/get-involved/research-registry>

For more information on VA's work on TBI, go to: <http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi/>

- **Five new members were recently appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women Veterans.**

This expert panel advises VA's Secretary on issues and programs impacting women veterans. Established in 1983, the Committee makes recommendations to the Secretary for policy and legislative changes.

New Members VA Advisory Committee on Women Veterans

- **Kailyn Bobb, Plumas Lake, California.** A U.S. Air Force veteran; currently pursuing a doctoral degree in clinical psychology from California School of Professional Psychology, Alliant International University.
- **Keith Howard-Streicher, Alexandria, Virginia.** A veteran of the U.S. Army; currently serves as assistant director, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, at The American Legion.
- **Edna Boyd Jones, Norcross, Georgia.** A retired U.S. Army colonel, with service in the Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom; currently serves as the assistant professor of nursing at Albany State University.
- **Leslie N. Smith, King George, Virginia.** A retired U.S. Army captain; currently serves as co-founder and spokesperson for Fatigues to Fabulous, a non-profit women veterans organization.
- **Janet M. West, Jacksonville, Florida.** An active duty U.S. Navy lieutenant commander, with service in Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom; currently serves as senior medical officer at Jacksonville Naval Air Station Branch Health Clinic.

Mary Westmoreland (Retired U.S. Army Colonel), who has diligently served on the Committee since 2012, was appointed as the Committee's new chair. Committee members Sara McVicker (U.S. Navy Veteran) Washington, DC, and Tia Christopher (U.S. Navy Veteran), Dallas, TX were reappointed for an additional term.

For information about VA's benefits and services for women veterans, visit www.va.gov/womenvet or contact the Women Veterans Call Center at 1-855-829-6636. The Women Veterans Call Center is available to address concerns of women Veterans, their families and caregivers, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., ET, and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., ET.

- **The Military Times reported that Michael Missal has been confirmed by the Senate to be**

the new inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Missal has previously worked as a senior counsel at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, and has extensive experience with congressional and federal investigations.

During his confirmation hearing in November, he promised to focus on issues of fraud and abuse but also "integrity at VA," given years of scandals and public missteps by the department.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new data examining changes in life expectancy from 2013 to 2014.**

The data showed that the U.S. population as a whole has not exhibited a statistically significant uptick in longevity since 2010.

Despite the positive influences of declines in heart disease and cancer and stroke, increases in other causes like suicide, chronic liver disease and unintentional poisonings were so large that they had a negative effect on life expectancy," Elizabeth Arias, PhD, a demographer with the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics and the author of the report.

There were measurable increases in life expectancy among the African-American and Hispanic population. Hispanic life expectancy increased from 81.6 to 81.8 years — the overall increase was seen in both men and women. Hispanics displayed the highest rates of longevity in the analysis. Life expectancy for African-Americans rose from 75.1 to 75.2 years, catalyzed by a significant improvement among black males, from 71.8 to 72.2 years. The overall life expectancy for non-Hispanic whites was 78.8 in 2014.

The life expectancy of white women, however, dipped by 0.1 years from 2013 to 2014. This datum reflects a larger trend in American life expectancy, which is one of stagnated improvement.

"We continue to deviate from what these other high-income countries are doing, especially among women...equally important will be what happens next year and the year after, and seeing if we are on some kind of new trend line."

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Office of Minority Health released data detailing the quality of care received by people with Medicare Advantage by racial or ethnic group.**

Measuring access to care, quality of care and physician communications, the study is intended to be used to improve quality and accountability.

The data are based on an analysis of two sources of information. The first is part of the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS). HEDIS collects information from medical records and administrative data on how well the needs of Medicare beneficiaries are met for a variety of medical issues, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic lung disease. The second part is the Medicare Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) Survey, which is conducted annually by CMS. CAHPS focuses on the health care experiences of Medicare beneficiaries across the nation.

A report summarizing the data accompanied the release. Analysis of the quality of care delivered to beneficiaries showed that Asians and Pacific Islanders typically received care that is similar to or better than the care received by Whites, whereas African Americans and Hispanics typically

received care that is similar to or worse than the care received by Whites. African Americans and Hispanics also reported their health care experiences as being similar to or worse than the experiences reported by Whites. This data help to highlight the racial and ethnic disparities that occur within healthcare.

The data and summary report can be viewed at: <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/OMH-DPAG-StatisticsAndData.html>

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Improve Access to Primary Care for Newly Enrolled Veterans,” (GAO-16-562T) was published on April 19, 2016.** This report examines newly enrolled veterans' access to primary care; and VHA's related oversight. GAO interviewed officials from six VA medical centers selected to provide variation in factors such as geographic location, clinical services offered, and average primary care wait times; reviewed a randomly selected, non-generalizable sample of medical records for 180 newly enrolled veterans; and interviewed VHA and medical center officials on oversight of access to primary care. GAO evaluated VHA's oversight against relevant federal standards for internal control. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676679.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel will hold a business hearing on **May 10, 2016**, to examine to markup those provisions which fall under the subcommittee's jurisdiction of the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017.
- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold hearings on **May 11-13 2016**, to examine to markup the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2017.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.4977** (introduced April 18, 2016): To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs complies with requirements relating to scheduling veterans for health care appointments, to improve the uniform application of directives of the Department, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Sponsor: Representative Jackie Walorski [IN-2]
- **H.R.4983** (introduced April 18, 2016): To provide information to prescribers in federally qualified health centers and facilities of the Indian Health Service on best practices for prescribing naloxone was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Natural Resources.
Sponsor: Representative H. Morgan Griffith [VA-9]
- **H.R.5001** (introduced April 20, 2016): To continue the use of a 3-month quarter EHR reporting period for health care providers to demonstrate meaningful use for 2016 under the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive payment programs, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Renee L. Ellmers [NC-2]

MEETINGS

- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 5, 2016**, in Washington D.C. <http://www.hjfc3.org/heroes-dinner>
 - The 6th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held **May 11-12, 2016**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>
 - The Disaster Health Education Symposium: Innovations for Tomorrow will be held on **Sept. 8, 2016**, at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Md. <https://ncdmph.usuhs.edu>.
 - The AUSA 2016 Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held **Oct. 3-5, 2015**, in Washington DC. <http://ausameetings.org/2016annualmeeting/>
 - 2016 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held on **Nov. 29- Dec. 2, 2016**, at the Gaylord National Harbor, Md. <http://www.amsusmeetings.org/>
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If you need further information on any item in the *Federal Health Update*, please contact Kate Theroux at (703) 447-3257 or by e-mail at katetheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com.