

Federal Health Update

JUNE 2, 2017

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Happy Memorial Day!

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- The House and Senate are in recess until June 5, 2018.
- **The House passed H.R. 467, the VA Scheduling Accountability Act, on May 24, 2017.** This legislation directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure that each VA medical facility annually certifies that it is in full compliance with all provisions of law and regulations relating to scheduling appointments for veterans hospital care and medical services. The VA may not waive any applicable provision of such laws or regulations.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The U.S. Army Veterinary Corps celebrates its 101st anniversary on June 3.**

The Army Veterinary Corps is responsible for military working dogs, ceremonial cavalry and caisson horse units throughout the country, as well as the personal pets of soldiers and retirees.

At Fort Leonard Wood, there are almost 3,000 active patient records and see an average of 25 to 30 appointments each day. It conducts wellness exams, health certificates for travel, vaccines, sick call visits, x-rays, ultrasound, and a variety of laboratory tests. It also conduct reproductive surgeries, mass removals, dental cleanings, and variety of other procedures as needed. We mainly see dogs and cats, but we've also had goats, llamas, chickens, ducks, ferrets, rabbits and other critters visit us as well.

Over the years, veterinarians have also played an increasing role in public health and safety. After realizing the importance of collaboration among various medical and environmental sciences, a new initiative of "One Health" was born.

This initiative recognizes the vital connection between human health, animal health and the health of our environment, and promotes the further study and advancement of the well-being of those three intertwined aspects. There are many diseases that threaten our health that directly involve animals. Diseases that can be transferred from animals to humans are known as "zoonotic," and those actually account for about 60 percent of all human diseases and over 70 percent of all new diseases.

The "One Health" initiative's slogan states, "One World, One Medicine, One Health," and the Veterinary Corps is proud to be at the forefront.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin delivered his first "State of the VA" address on May 31, 2017.**

In his remarks, Shulkin highlighting the activity and direction of the agency since his appointment in February. He outlined the progress the agency is making while also acknowledging the shortcomings that the VA has identified and will address in the upcoming months.

"As a physician, I tend to look at things in terms of the way I was trained — assess, diagnose and then aggressively treat the patient," Shulkin said. "Though we are taking immediate and decisive steps, we are still in critical condition and require intensive care."

The address covered a wide spectrum of issues within the VA, including Access to Care; Community Care and Choice; Accountability; and the quality of care provided to Veterans. Secretary Shulkin identified multiple priorities, such as reducing backlogs and getting more Veterans access to mental health care and suicide prevention programs.

Addressing improvements in accountability and VA administration, Shulkin stated that while he was able to initiate the Executive Order establishing the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection signed by President Trump, "further legislation is needed and needed now."

The goal, the Secretary said, is to "turn the VA into the organization Veterans and their families deserve, and one that America can take pride in."

A fact sheet highlighting some of the elements of Secretary Shulkin's address as well as the text of his address can be found at: http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/StateofVA_FactSheet_5-31-2017.pdf

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Department of Health and Human Services announced the availability of over \$70 million over multiple years to help communities and healthcare providers prevent opioid overdose deaths and provide treatment for opioid use disorder, of which \$28 million will be dedicated for medication-assisted treatment (MAT).**

Opioid overdoses claimed more than 33,000 lives in 2015, but preventive actions, treatment for addiction, and proper response to overdoses can help. Money from two grant funding opportunities, recently authorized by the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), will expand access to lifesaving overdose reversal medications and train healthcare providers to refer patients to appropriate follow-up drug treatment; funds from a third grant funding opportunity will provide for medication-assisted treatment of opioid use disorders.

Administered through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), these funds will be made available through the following three grants:

- **Medication-Assisted Treatment and Prescription Drugs Opioid Addiction:** Up to \$28 million to 5 grantees to increase access of medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder. Medication-assisted treatment combines behavioral therapy and FDA-approved medication.
- **First Responders:** Up to \$41.7 million over 4 years available to approximately 30 grantees to train and provide resources for first responders and members of other key community sectors on carrying and administering an FDA approved product for emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdose.
- **Improving Access to Overdose Treatment:** Up to \$1 million over 5 years to one grantee to expand availability to overdose reversal medications in healthcare settings and to establish protocols to connect patients who have experienced a drug overdose with appropriate treatment.

Additionally, on May 4, SAMHSA released two other Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act-related funding opportunities. These funding opportunities will be open through July 3, 2017:

- **[State Pilot Grant Program for Treatment for Pregnant and Postpartum Women:](#)** Up to \$3.3 million to support a range of family-based services for [pregnant and postpartum women](#) with substance use disorder.
- **[Building Communities of Recovery:](#)** Up to \$2.6 million to mobilize resources within and outside of the recovery community to increase the prevalence and quality of long-term recovery support from substance abuse and addiction.

Please review the funding opportunity announcements at [SAMHSA's 2017 grant announcements page](#). Applicants with questions about program issues should contact the program person listed in the funding announcement. The deadline to apply may differ depending on the funding announcement. For questions on grants management issues contact Eileen Bermudez at (240) 276-1412 or FOACSAP@samhsa.hhs.gov or FOACSAT@samhsa.hhs.gov.

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is readying a fraud prevention initiative that removes Social Security numbers from Medicare cards to help combat identity theft, and safeguard taxpayer dollars.**

The new cards will use a unique, randomly-assigned number called a Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI), to replace the Social Security-based Health Insurance Claim Number (HICN)

currently used on the Medicare card. CMS will begin mailing new cards in April 2018 and will meet the congressional deadline for replacing all Medicare cards by April 2019.

CMS is kicking-off a multi-faceted outreach campaign to help providers get ready for the new MBI.

Providers and beneficiaries will both be able to use secure look up tools that will support quick access to MBIs when they need them. There will also be a 21-month transition period where providers will be able to use either the MBI or the HICN further easing the transition

Personal identity theft affects a large and growing number of seniors. People age 65 or older are increasingly the victims of this type of crime. Incidents among seniors increased to 2.6 million from 2.1 million between 2012 and 2014, according to the most current statistics from the Department of Justice. Identity theft can take not only an emotional toll on those who experience it, but also a financial one: two-thirds of all identity theft victims reported a direct financial loss. It can also disrupt lives, damage credit ratings and result in inaccuracies in medical records and costly false claims.

Work on this important initiative began many years ago, and was accelerated following passage of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA). CMS will assign all Medicare beneficiaries a new, unique MBI number which will contain a combination of numbers and uppercase letters. Beneficiaries will be instructed to safely and securely destroy their current Medicare cards and keep the new MBI confidential. Issuance of the new MBI will not change the benefits a Medicare beneficiary receives.

CMS is committed to a successful transition to the MBI for people with Medicare and for the health care provider community. CMS has a [website](#) dedicated to the Social Security Removal Initiative (SSNRI) where providers can find the latest information and sign-up for newsletters. CMS is also planning regular calls as a way to share updates and answer provider questions before and after new cards are mailed beginning in April 2018.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/ssnri/index.html>

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Medicare Advantage: CMS Should Use Data on Disenrollment and Beneficiary Health Status to Strengthen Oversight,” (GAO-17-393) on May 30, 2017.** This report examines the extent of any health-biased disenrollment; beneficiaries' reasons for leaving contracts with and without health-biased disenrollment; and how, if at all, CMS identifies contracts with health-biased disenrollment, for routine oversight purposes.<http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/684386.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **June 8, 2017**, to examine the posture of the Department of the Navy in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2018 and the Future Years Defense Program.

LEGISLATION

- There was no relevant legislation proposed this week.

MEETINGS

- The AUSA 2017 Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held **Oct. 9-11, 2017**, in Washington DC. <http://ausameetings.org/2017annualmeeting/>
- The 2017 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held on **Nov. 27- Dec. 1, 2017**, at the Gaylord National Harbor, Md. <http://www.amsus.org/annual-meeting/>

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.