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

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The Update will not be published on Aug 24 and 31, 2018.

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- The House is in recess until Sept. 4, 2018.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) released the findings from its latest TRICARE survey on Aug. 1, 2018.

According to MOAA, beneficiaries' overall satisfaction with the TRICARE program has decreased. Compared to survey results from December 2017, the new data shows increasing dissatisfaction across all categories, including provider choice, access to providers and especially among medication costs. Over 8,500 TRICARE beneficiaries responded to the most recent survey.

Survey respondents indicated concerns regarding the costs of their health care. The results revealed some beneficiary categories are more likely than others to alter their health care decisions based upon increased costs.
Beneficiaries who identified themselves as spouses, enlisted and either using TRICARE Prime or Select were more likely to cancel or postpone treatment out of cost concerns. TRICARE for Life (TFL) respondents continue to show the greatest overall satisfaction with their health care.

Key findings from the survey include:

- Eighty percent of TFL beneficiaries were either very satisfied or mostly satisfied with their benefit. Yet, only 50 percent of those using TRICARE Select were very or mostly satisfied, and 28 percent were very to mostly dissatisfied.

- Trends in satisfaction with the cost of medications have decreased. Previously 42 percent were very satisfied with the cost of their medication. The new data shows only 28 percent remain very satisfied. A full 22 percent are either very or mostly dissatisfied.

- Over 50 percent of beneficiaries responded that they were somewhat to very concerned about being able to afford their medications. This is a dramatic shift from previous responses when beneficiaries were largely unconcerned about affording their prescriptions.

- When asked how frequently beneficiaries canceled or postponed medical appointments in the past year out of cost concerns, 85 percent indicated they had never done so - down from 94 percent previously. Of those who had, 10 percent said they had done so 1 or 2 times, 3 percent 3 or 4 times, and 2 percent indicated they had 5 or more times.

- Specialty appointments were the most frequently canceled or postponed appointment type as reported by 62 percent of those who had done it. Physical therapy and mental health appointments were the most reported sub-types.

- Most beneficiaries, 76 percent, responded that they made no changes to their prescriptions during the past year.

- However, 17 percent shifted from retail to home delivery, and 8 percent shifted from home delivery to the military treatment facility.

MOAA conducted the online survey in June. Another survey will be fielded in six months.

Data Computer Corporation of America (DCCA) announced that it has been awarded a task order by the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to provide development and operations support services to DHA’s Electronic Commerce System (ECS), an enterprise-wide system that supports TRICARE.

ECS, an integrated set of financial management, acquisition support, contract management, and contract operations applications, supports TRICARE’s procure-to-pay, budget-to-report, and order-to-cash processes.

Under the terms of the E-Commerce Operational Systems Support (EOSS) task order, DCCA will maintain and operate ECS and provide a wide-range of engineering and technical support, including engineering management, sustainment engineering, enhancement engineering, change and modernization engineering and information assurance for the DHA ECS software applications and databases. Additionally, DCCA will provide cybersecurity services.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- *Stars and Strips* reports the Department of Veterans Affairs is against extending VA benefits to sailors who served off the coast during the Vietnam War and claim their illnesses were caused by exposure to Agent Orange.
Agent Orange has been found to cause several health conditions, including, Hodgkin's Disease, various cancers, Parkinson's disease and heart disease. The Senate VA Committee is considering legislation to provide disability compensation to approximately 90,000 "Blue Water" Navy veterans—sailors aboard aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and other ships during the Vietnam War who believe they were exposed to Agent Orange through the ships' water systems.

During a recent Senate Veterans Affairs Committee meeting, VA Undersecretary of Benefits Paul Lawrence testified that there is insufficient evidence to link these veterans to Agent Orange exposure. Lawrence said approving benefits for illnesses without proof that they were caused by military service could erode confidence in the soundness and fairness of the veterans benefits system.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- On Aug. 1, 2018, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and the Treasury issued a final rule that allows for the sale and renewal of short-term, limited-duration health insurance plans.

  These plans cost less, offer fewer medical services are exempt from covering people with pre-existing conditions. Initial coverage can last as long as one year and can be extended for as much as three years.

  The average monthly premium for an individual in the fourth quarter of 2016 for a short-term, limited-duration policy was approximately $124, compared with $393 for an unsubsidized individual market plan.

  The final rule can be found here: https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2018-16568.pdf

  A fact sheet on today’s proposed rule can be found here: https://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Fact-sheets/2018-Fact-sheets-items/2018-08-01.html

REPORTS/POLICIES


HILL HEARINGS

- There are no health-related hearings scheduled next week.

LEGISLATION

- H S.3337 (introduced August 1, 2018): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to revise and extend projects relating to children and to provide access to school-based comprehensive mental health programs was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and

- **S.3338** (introduced August 1, 2018): A bill to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to finalize certain proposed provisions relating to the Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) under the Medicare and Medicaid programs was referred to the Committee on Finance. Sponsor: Senator Thomas. Carper R. [D-DE]

- **S.3302** (introduced July 31, 2018): A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the non-applicability of non-Department of Veterans Affairs covenants not to compete to the appointment of physicians in the Veterans Health Administration, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. Sponsor: Senator John. Boozman [R-AR]

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MEETINGS


- The 2018 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held on **Nov. 26-30, 2018**, at the Gaylord National Harbor, Md. [http://www.amsusmeetings.org/home-2/](http://www.amsusmeetings.org/home-2/)

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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 katherine@federalhealthcarenews.com.