

Federal Health Update

AUG 7, 2015

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

Sponsored by:

SPECTRUM[®]
HEALTHCARE RESOURCES
www.spectrumhealth.com
800-325-3982

Additional Sponsorship Opportunities Available.

Please contact Kate Theroux if you are interested in supporting this service.

ktheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com

The Update will not be published on Aug. 14 and 28, 2015.

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **This week the Senate confirmed Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr. as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Air Force Gen. Paul Selva was confirmed as the next vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs; and Air Force Gen. Darren McDew was confirmed to replace him as the new head of U.S. Transportation Command.**
- **The House passed H.R. 1994, the VA Accountability Act of 2015 on July 29, 2015.** This legislation authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to remove or demote a VA employee based on performance or misconduct. The VA may also remove such individual from the civil service or demote the individual through a reduction in grade or annual pay rate.
- **President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate the following individuals to key Administration posts:**

Marcel Lettre, Nominee for Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, Department of Defense

Lettre is the principal deputy under secretary of defense for intelligence, a position he has held since 2013. He has served concurrently as acting under secretary of defense for intelligence since May 2015. From 2011 to 2013, Lettre served as special assistant to Secretaries of Defense Chuck Hagel, Leon Panetta, and Robert Gates. From 2009 to 2011, Lettre was the principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for legislative affairs. Lettre received a B.A.

from the University of the South and an M.P.P. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Patrick J. Murphy, Nominee for Under Secretary of the Army, Department of Defense

Murphy is a partner at the law firm of Fox Rothschild LLP in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He has also served on the Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy since 2011. As the first Iraq War veteran elected to the U.S. Congress, Mr. Murphy represented the 8th District of Pennsylvania in the United States House of Representatives from 2007 to 2011. He served on the House Armed Services Committee, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and the House Appropriations Committee. From 2003 to 2004, he was deployed to Iraq as a paratrooper with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, where he earned the Bronze Star for Service. In Murphy received a B.A. from King's College and a J.D. from Widener University School of Law.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The House and Senate were unable to come to an agreement between the two versions of the FY 2016 National Defense Authorization Act before the House left for its August recess.**

TRICARE beneficiaries saw TRICARE pharmacy co-pays rise by \$3 for most prescriptions earlier this year. The Senate's draft version of the defense bill would go further, supporting Pentagon proposals for more hikes on brand-name medications and certain drugs not listed in TRICARE's formulary.

House lawmakers had opposed those moves, instead including in their draft of the bill only a pilot program to study ways to reduce government costs.

If any co-pay increase is approved, it would be the third such hike for military families and retirees in the last four years.

While retirement reform plans represent a major transformation for military benefits. Both the House and Senate retirement plans support creating a new system built around portable 401(k)-style investment accounts. Currently serving troops would be grandfathered under the old 20-year, all-or-nothing rules, but would be able to opt into the updated system, if they chose to, alongside new enlistees. Under the revamped plan, troops would still see pension-style payouts for 20 years of service, but at a 20-percent reduction from the current benefit.

But minor differences in the two chambers' plans have become another major sticking point for the conference committee. The Senate wants a smaller federal match to the investment accounts, a slower start to the new system and lump-sum options for some payouts. House lawmakers are pushing for their version instead, offering more generous provisions to future generations of troops.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it will start the process of amending its regulations to establish presumptions of service connection for certain conditions resulting from exposure to contaminated drinking water at the U.S. Marine Corps Base**

Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

This process is in addition to the healthcare VA already provides for 15 conditions to eligible veterans who were stationed at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987 as a result of the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012. VA also provides reimbursement of healthcare expenses for those 15 conditions to eligible family members who resided at Camp Lejeune during that time period.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs recently met with Senators Isakson, Burr and Tillis and the Director of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to discuss the creation of presumptions of service connection for diseases associated with the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. The diseases that are currently being reviewed for potential presumptive service connection include kidney cancer, angiosarcoma of the liver, and acute myelogenous leukemia, which are known to be related to long-term exposure to the chemicals that were in the water at Lejeune from the 1950s through 1987. The chemicals are Benzene, Vinyl Chloride, Trichloroethylene and Perchloroethylene, which are known as volatile organic compounds, used in industrial solvents and components of fuels. ATSDR and VA representatives will meet at ATSDR offices on August 19 to begin discussions on establishing these presumptions.

VA will also work with ATSDR and potentially the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate the body of scientific knowledge and research related to exposure to these chemicals and the subsequent development of other diseases. VA will carefully consider all public comments received when determining the final scope of any presumptions.

Veterans with health problems they believe are related to exposure to the water at Camp Lejeune may file a claim for disability compensation online at www.ebenefits.va.gov, or call 1-800-827-1000 for assistance

For more information, veterans and family members should contact the nearest VA healthcare facility by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune. For further information on Camp Lejeune: VHA Office of Public Health has a Website on Camp Lejeune historical water contamination at: www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune/index.asp.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched two new no-cost training programs, Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) and VA Learning Hubs, to help transitioning service members and veterans from all eras learn skills, earn credentials, and advance in civilian careers following separation from service.**

ALPs and Learning Hubs are part of VA's [Veterans Economic Communities Initiative \(VECI\)](#), promoting education and employment opportunities for Veterans through integrated networks of support in 50 cities. VA launched the VECI program in response to President Obama's August 2014 challenge to help Veterans and families integrate with their communities and find meaningful jobs that can lead to economic success. Under VA Secretary Robert McDonald's [MyVA](#) transformation, VECI is now in place in cities across the United States.

ALPs offer transitioning service members and veterans the opportunity to build on their world-class training and technical skills gained through their military service, and earn certifications in high-demand fields.

VA is piloting ALPs this summer with seven courses focusing on building skills and certifications needed to advance in high-demand careers in information technology (IT), as part of the President's TechHire initiative. Each ALP course is offered at no cost and includes free referral and support services.

VA is also launching Learning Hubs in 27 cities across the country this year in partnership with

the American Red Cross, The Mission Continues and Coursera, an online education platform.

For more information about the VECI or to learn more about VA ALPs and Learning Hubs, contact VeteranEmployment.vbaco@va.gov.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Fewer than 1 in 5 middle and high schools in the U.S. began the school day at the recommended 8:30 AM start time or later during the 2011-2012 school year, according to data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

Too-early start times can keep students from getting the sleep they need for health, safety, and academic success, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

CDC and U.S. Department of Education researchers reviewed data from the [2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey](#) of nearly 40,000 public middle, high, and combined schools to determine school start times.

Schools that have a start time of 8:30 AM or later allow adolescent students the opportunity to get the recommended amount of sleep on school nights: about 8.5 to 9.5 hours. Insufficient sleep is common among high school students and is associated with several health risks such as being overweight, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and using drugs – as well as poor academic performance. The proportion of high school students who fail to get sufficient sleep (2 out of 3) has remained steady since 2007, according to the [2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Report](#).

Key findings:

- 42 states reported that 75-100 percent of the public schools in their respective states started before 8:30 AM.
- The average start time was 8:03 AM.
- The percentage of schools with start times of 8:30 AM or later varied greatly by state. No schools in Hawaii, Mississippi, and Wyoming started at 8:30 AM or later; more than 75 percent of schools in Alaska and North Dakota started at 8:30 AM or later.
- Louisiana had the earliest average school start time (7:40 AM), while Alaska had the latest (8:33 AM).

In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy [statement](#) urging middle and high schools to modify start times to no earlier than 8:30 AM to aid students in getting sufficient sleep to improve their overall health. School start time policies are not determined at the federal or state level, but at the district or individual school level. Future studies may determine whether this recommendation results in later school start times.

The authors report that delayed school start times do not replace the need for other interventions that can improve sleep among adolescents. Parents can help their children practice good sleep habits. For example, a consistent bedtime and rise time, including on weekends, is recommended for everyone, including children, adolescents, and adults. Health care providers who treat adolescents should educate teens and parents about the importance of adequate sleep in maintaining health and well-being.

To learn about CDC's efforts to promote sufficient sleep, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/sleep/index.html>.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Federal Autism Research: Updated Information on Funding from Fiscal Years 2008 through 2012” (GAO-15-583R) on July 30, 2015.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 1 in 68 children have been identified as having autism—a developmental disorder involving communication and social impairment. According to CDC, there are likely many causes of autism and many factors, including environmental, biologic, and genetic, that may make a child more likely to have autism. This report examines federal autism research funding. In this report, GAO describes how the amount of federal funding in each of the research areas specified in the IACC’s strategic plan changed from fiscal years 2008 through 2012. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/671079.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- There are no hearings scheduled next week.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.3441** (introduced Aug. 4, 2015): To amend the Public Health Service Act to establish education programs for patients and health care providers regarding cell-free DNA prenatal screening, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler [WA-3]
- **S.1916** (introduced Aug. 3, 2015): A bill to include skilled nursing facilities as a type of health care provider under section 254(h) of the Communications Act of 1934 was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.
Sponsor: Senator John Thune, John [SD].
- **S.1917** (introduced Aug. 3, 2015): A bill to prohibit the provision of Federal funds to an entity that receives compensation for facilitating the donation of fetal tissue derived from an abortion was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
Sponsor: Senator Susan M. Collins [ME]
- **S.1945** (introduced Aug. 5, 2015): A bill to make available needed psychiatric, psychological, and supportive services for individuals with mental illness and families in mental health crisis, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
Sponsor: Senator Bill Cassidy [LA]
- **S.2000** (introduced Aug. 5, 2015): A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into certain agreements with non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers if the Secretary is not feasibly able to provide health care in facilities of the Department or through contracts or sharing agreements, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Sponsor: Senator John Hoeven [ND]
- **S.2002** (introduced Aug. 5, 2015): A bill to strengthen our mental health system and improve public safety was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.
Sponsor: Senator John Cornyn [TX]

MEETINGS

- The 2015 Military Health System Research Symposium will be held **Aug. 17-20, 2015**. The location has yet to be determined. <https://mhsrs.amedd.army.mil/SitePages/about-public.aspx>
- The 2015 AHRQ Research Conference, “Producing Evidence and Engaging Partners to Improve Health Care”, will be held **Oct. 4–6, 2015**, in Crystal City, Va. <http://www.ahrq.gov/news/events/conference/index.html>
- The AUSA 2015 Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held **Oct. 12-14, 2015**, in Washington DC. <http://ausameetings.org/2015annualmeeting/>
- 2015 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting - The Society of Federal Health Professionals will be held on **Dec. 1-4, 2015**, in San Antonio, Texas. <http://amsusmeetings.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.