

# Federal Health Update

SEPT. 14, 2012

*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

- **The House passed H. Res.778, providing for consideration of the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 117) making continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2013 on Sept. 13, 2012.**

The \$1.047 trillion bill provides funding for the first six months of fiscal year 2013 at 0.6 percent higher than the current fiscal year. The Senate is expected to vote on the plan later next week.

## MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **On Sept. 5, 2012, the Department of Defense (DoD) launched the Operation Tomodachi Registry website.**

The website provides location-based radiation dose estimate reports for adults and children comprising the DoD-affiliated population on or near mainland Japan following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011.

DoD-affiliated members who were in Japan during the nuclear reactor crisis, medical providers, and the public at large will be able to download location-based radiation dose estimate reports from the website. These reports include medical interpretations and provide comparisons of the Operation Tomodachi radiation doses with more commonly experienced radiation doses.

The website also includes information on the event, DoD's response to the crisis, and answers to frequently asked questions. By the end of the calendar year, individuals in the registry may request a dose assessment that is individually tailored for them, based on more detailed location data that they can provide using the "Contact Us" function on the Operation Tomodachi Registry website.

After extensive environmental monitoring and analysis, it has been determined that none of the nearly 70,000 members of the DoD-affiliated population (service members, DoD civilian employees and contractors, and family members of service members and civilian employees) who were on or near the mainland of Japan between March 12 and May 11, 2011, are known to have been exposed to radiation at levels associated with adverse medical conditions.

The Operation Tomodachi Registry, which will be housed in a secure database containing the names, locations, and radiation doses for all members of the DoD-affiliated population, will be completed by Dec. 31, 2012. Personally identified information will be omitted from this website.

The registry can be found online at <http://registry.csd.disa.mil/otr>.

- **The U.S. Army and National Football League are working together to research and improve awareness of traumatic brain injuries.**

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno and NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell say soldiers and athletes share some of the same traits that may prevent them from reaching out for help. Mental and physical toughness and the desire to put the team first may keep many warriors from seeking treatment for their injuries.

The new project aims to educate players and soldiers about TBI, especially mild concussions. The entities will share research, including placing sensors inside the helmets of soldiers and football players to help detect possible concussions.

The effort comes as a growing number of NFL players suffer concussions during the season. For service members, recent policies also aim to help detect mild brain injuries. To learn more about the new project, visit the [DoD Live blog](#).

- **General Dynamics Information Technology has entered into an agreement, worth \$41.8 million with the U.S. Army Medical Research Materiel Command (USAMRMC) under its TRICARE Evaluation, Analysis and Management Support (TEAMS) contract program.**

Per this task order, the company will offer service support assistance to the USAMRMC for vaccine, drug and medical device development programs under the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Development Activity (USAMMDA). The tenure of the TEAMS contract program is four years and seven months.

USAMMDA is the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) advanced medical materiel development initiative for designing new products to protect and preserve the lives of service members. It creates new types of vaccines, drugs and medical support devices, which subsequently enhance readiness while providing better standard of quality medical care to the DoD. Further, it also maximizes the survival rates related to medical casualties in the battleground.

In the future, General Dynamics will provide a wide array of services to facilitate the USAMMDA guide for new medical technologies through the USFDA regulatory and certification procedures. The company will also work on strategies to convey these new products into the end users.

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **In recognition of September as Suicide Prevention Month, the Department of Veterans Affairs is calling on individuals and communities across the country to show their support for veterans in crisis and help raise awareness of the VA mental health services veterans have earned.**

The theme for the outreach campaign, “*Stand by Them,*” is part of a joint VA/Department of Defense (DoD) effort focused on veteran and service member support networks, especially their friends and family members, who may be the first to realize a veteran or service member is in crisis.

Throughout September and beyond, VA is partnering with the DoD and other agencies, while urging community-based organizations, veterans service organizations, health care providers and private companies to stand by veterans and service members. These groups can educate their networks about recognizing suicide risk and encouraging those at risk to call the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 and Press 1), chat online at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text to 838255.

Supporters can work with local Suicide Prevention Coordinators — located at each VA Medical Center across the country — to coordinate special outreach events that encourage the public to make a difference in the lives of veterans. In September, these local coordinators will host seminars, organize health fairs, conduct training and information sessions, join in community events, organize events at their facilities and provide local organizations with educational and promotional material to distribute to veterans and their loved ones.

Today, VA is also launching a new national public service announcement “*Side by Side*” that focuses on the important role family and community play in supporting veterans in crisis.

To learn more about Suicide Prevention Month or to find a VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator near you, visit [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net). For more information about VA’s mental health resources, please visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov).

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs published a final rule in the Sept. 5 *Federal Register*, amending its regulations concerning veterans in need of service dogs.**

The new rule excludes the use of service dogs for mental disabilities as a covered benefit.

The VA said that this restriction is based on a lack of evidence to support a finding of mental health service dog efficacy. In contrast, VA’s shared national experience has been to directly observe positive clinical outcomes related to the use of service dogs and increased mobility and independent completion of activities for veterans with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments.

- **Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Eric K. Shinseki announced a joint effort to expand health care delivery to veterans living in rural areas.**

The agreement between the two agencies promotes collaboration between VA facilities and private hospitals and clinics, and is supported by \$983,100 in grants to improve access and coordination of care through telehealth and health information exchanges in rural areas.

Three states with the highest density of veteran residents — Virginia, Montana and Alaska — will each receive approximately \$300,000 to implement or upgrade telehealth capabilities for veterans who must otherwise travel long distances to access medical, mental and behavioral health care. The grants will be used for telehealth equipment and to develop electronic health records that are compatible with the VA’s Veterans Health

Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VISTA) system.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Telehealth Expansion Initiative, launched in May 2011, is growing VA's telehealth workforce across the country, and will provide a potential capacity of 1.2 million telehealth consultations annually when fully implemented.

Administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, the grants are part of a pilot program to spur collaborative telehealth networks and virtual linkages among rural health providers and the VA to help meet the needs of rural veterans.

## GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced \$12.5 million in grants to Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) to support older Americans and people with disabilities stay independent and receive long-term services and supports.**

These grants support counselors who help individuals and their caregivers identify and access long-term services and supports, regardless of income or financial assets.

ADRCs are "one-stop shops" for older adults, people with disabilities, their caregivers and families to get the information and services they need as their health and long-term care needs change. They offer a single, coordinated system of information and access for people seeking long-term services and supports and help consumers and their families identify options that best suit their needs. ADRCs also make it easier for state and local governments to manage resources and monitor program quality through coordinated data collection and evaluation efforts.

Currently, all 50 states and four territories are operating or are in the process of implementing an ADRC.

Two different types of grants are being announced. Part A is for states or territories receiving an initial ADRC grant for an Enhanced ADRC Options Counseling Program. Part B is for states and territories receiving continuation funding.

For more information about the grants, recipients and the ADRC initiative, see <http://www.hhs.gov/acl/news/adrc-grants09112012.html>.

- **The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Aubagio (teriflunomide), a once-a-day tablet for the treatment of adults with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (MS).**

MS is a chronic, inflammatory, autoimmune disease of the central nervous system that disrupts communication between the brain and other parts of the body. It is among the most common causes of neurological disability in young adults and occurs at least twice as frequently in women as in men. For most people with MS, episodes of worsening function (relapses) are initially followed by recovery periods (remissions). Over time, recovery periods may be incomplete, leading to progressive decline.

The drug contains a Boxed Warning to alert prescribers and patients to the risk of liver problems, including death, and a risk of birth defects. Physicians should do blood tests to check liver function before a patient starts taking Aubagio and periodically during treatment.

Aubagio, manufactured by Bridgewater, N.J.-based Sanofi Aventis, will be dispensed with a patient Medication Guide that provides important instructions on its use and drug

safety information.

- **According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 48.6 million people were uninsured in 2011, down from 49.9 million in 2010.**

The rate declined 0.6 percentage points, from 16.3 percent in 2010 to 15.7 percent in 2011, which is the biggest percentage drop since 1999. The decline is attributed to the increase in the number of people covered by government health insurance -- primarily the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Increasing for the fifth consecutive year, the percentage of people covered by government health insurance rose from 31.2 percent in 2010 to 32.2 percent last year.

The rate of private health insurance remained stable in 2011, not declining for the first time in the last decade. And the percentage of young adults between the ages of 19 and 25 fell 2.2 percent, from 29.8 percent in 2010 to 27.7 percent in 2011 -- second consecutive year that the uninsured rate for the age group has fallen by more than two percent.

## REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The Institute of Medicine published “How Far Have We Come in Reducing Health Disparities? Progress Since 2000 - Workshop Summary,” on Sept. 12, 2012.** This report examines the progress made to address health disparities and focused on the success of various federal initiatives to reduce health disparities.  
<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/How-Far-Have-We-Come-in-Reducing-Health-Disparities.aspx>
- **The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published “Improving Food Safety Through a One Health Approach - Workshop Summary,” on Sept. 10, 2012.** In this report, IOM examined issues critical to the protection of the nation’s food supply. The workshop explored existing knowledge and unanswered questions on the nature and extent of food-borne threats to health. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/Improving-Food-Safety-Through-a-One-Health-Approach.aspx>
- **The GAO published “Anthrax: DHS Faces Challenges in Validating Methods for Sample Collection and Analysis,” (GAO-12-488) on Sept. 12, 2012.** In this report, GAO examined whether DHS’s actions have addressed GAO’s 2003 recommendations regarding sampling; the environmental sampling methods for B. anthracis spore detection in initial public health sampling and microbial forensic investigations have been validated; and any challenges remain to completing validation.  
<http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/593193.pdf>
- **The GAO published “VA Disability Compensation: Actions Needed to Address Hurdles Facing Program Modernization,” (GAO-12-846) on Sept. 10, 2012.** This report examines VA’s progress in revising its rating schedule with updated medical and economic information; and the opportunities and challenges of various policy approaches proposed by commissions and others for updating VA’s disability benefits structure.  
<http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/647877.pdf>

## HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **Sept. 20, 2012**, to review VA's performance and accountability.
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **Sept. 20, 2012**, to examine the re-design of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)
- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **Sept. 21, 2012**, to evaluate the effectiveness of the New State Strike Force Team.

## LEGISLATION

- **S.3530** (introduced Sept. 12, 2012): A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a process to determine whether individuals claiming certain service in the Philippines during World War II are eligible for certain benefits despite not being on the Missouri List, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Sponsor: Senator Dean Heller [NV]

## MEETINGS

- HJF Military Medicine Symposium: Clinical Manifestations of TBI and PTSD will be held on **Sept. 20, 2012**, in Rockville Md. <http://www.cvent.com/d/jcqgh7>
- CFHA's 14th Annual Conference: will be held on **Oct. 4-6, 2012**, in Austin, Texas <http://www.cfha.net/?page=2012Austin>
- 1st Annual OSEHRA Open Source EHR Summit and Workshop will be held **Oct. 17-18, 2012**, at National Harbor, Maryland. <http://www.cvent.com/events/1st-annual-osehra-open-source-ehr-summit-workshop/event-summary-6c9df6adea0b49b9966cf660175ed5a8.aspx> .
- The American Public Health Association (APHA) 140<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Exposition will be held on **Oct. 27-31, 2012**, in San Francisco, Calif. <http://www.apha.org/meetings/AnnualMeeting/>
- The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting will be held on **Nov. 1-3, 2012**, in Los Angeles, Calif. <http://www.istss.org/Home1.htm>
- The AMIA 2012 Annual Symposium will be held on **Nov. 7-11, 2012**, in Chicago Ill. <http://www.amia.org/amia2012>
- The 118th AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held **Nov. 11-15, 2012**, in Phoenix, Ariz. <http://amsusmeeting.org>
- The 2012 American Academy of Medical Administrators (AAMA) Annual Conference will be held on **Nov. 13 - 16, 2012**, San Antonio, Texas <http://www.aameda.org/Conference/Annual/AnnualMain.html>
- The Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) 2012: Patients First will be held on **Nov. 25-30, 2012**, in Chicago, Ill. [http://www.rsna.org/Annual\\_Meeting.aspx](http://www.rsna.org/Annual_Meeting.aspx)
- The 2012 Special Operations Medical Association (SOMA) Conference will be held on **Dec. 15-18, 2012**, in Tampa, Fla. <http://www.specialoperationsmedicine.org/>
- The International Meeting of Simulation in Healthcare (IMSH) 2013 will be held on **Jan. 26-30, 2013**, in Orlando, Fla. <http://ssih.org/events/imsh-2013-central>

- The 2013 Military Health System Conference will be held **Feb. 11-14, 2013**, in National Harbor, Md.

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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@federalhealthnews.com](mailto:katetheroux@federalhealthnews.com).**