

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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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **The House and Senate are in recess until after the election.**

On Sept. 22, 2012, the Senate passed H.J. Res. 117, a joint resolution making continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2013, and for other purposes. The president is expected to sign the legislation into law this week.

- **President Barack Obama has nominated Alan F. Estevez to be the next principal deputy undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology, and logistics.**

Estevez is currently assistant secretary of defense for logistics and materiel readiness. Prior to his appointment in 2011, he was principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for logistics and materiel readiness. From 2002 to 2006, he was assistant deputy undersecretary of defense for supply chain integration. From 1991 to 2002, Mr. Estevez worked within the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the United States Army Strategic Logistics Agency.

Estevez is the recipient of the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service, the Secretary of Defense Medal for Meritorious Civilian Service, and the 2005 Service to America Medal. Mr. Estevez received a B.A. from Rutgers University and an M.A. from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **TRICARE Management Activity (TMA) published guidance for beneficiaries on changes about filling prescription overseas.**

According to the guidance, home delivery of prescription medications to APO/FPO addresses is subject to local laws and could be seized by local nation customs authorities.

This announcement was prompted because German customs officials are enforcing legal restrictions on imported items, including prescription drugs being sent there through the APO/FPO system.

TMA advises beneficiaries in Germany who have their prescription medications seized to contact Express Scripts customer service at 1-877-363-1303 or one of the country-specific phone numbers listed on the Express Scripts contact page to discuss other ways to get your prescription.

- **The Army released suicide data for the month of August.**

During August, among active-duty soldiers, there were 16 potential suicides: three have been confirmed as suicides and 13 remain under investigation. For 2012, there have been 131 potential active-duty suicides: 80 have been confirmed as suicides and 51 remain under investigation. Active-duty suicide number for 2011: 165 confirmed as suicides and no cases under investigation.

During August, among reserve component soldiers who were not on active duty, there were nine potential suicides (five Army National Guard and four Army Reserve): none have been confirmed as suicide and nine remain under investigation. For 2012, there have been 80 potential not on active-duty suicides (49 Army National Guard and 31 Army Reserve): 59 have been confirmed as suicides and 21 remain under investigation. Not on active-duty suicide numbers for 2011: 118 (82 Army National Guard and 36 Army Reserve) confirmed as suicides and no cases under investigation.

The Army's comprehensive list of Suicide Prevention Program information is located at <http://www.preventsuicide.army.mil>.

- **An Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center study published in the Medical Surveillance Monthly Report in June 2012 found that since 2010, suicide has been the second most prevalent cause of death for service members, exceeded only by war injury.**

In addition, the study revealed that about five percent of active duty military suicides between 1998 and 2011 were by women.

The ongoing Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS) reports suicide rates for female soldiers triple when they go to war, according to preliminary data released in March 2011.

- **TRICARE Management Activity (TMA) announced new updates to the mobile application for beneficiaries to manage their TRICARE pharmacy benefit.**

The app, created by TRICARE pharmacy contractor Express Script, includes medication reminders and an account registration tool. The reminder feature gives beneficiaries the option to set up daily alerts to make sure they take their medications as prescribed and don't skip a dose. The account registration feature lets beneficiaries create their ESI account right on their smart phone.

Currently, the Express Rx app and mobile-optimized website allow beneficiaries to register for TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery and change current prescriptions over to home delivery. They can also order home delivery refills and check order status. Another feature lets beneficiaries look up information on their current prescriptions. For GPS-enabled smart phones, the app can direct beneficiaries to the nearest network retail pharmacy.

Smartphone users can download the app for free by going to www.express-

scripts.com/mobile or using services like the Apple App Store or Android Marketplace. The mobile-optimized pharmacy website is accessible at <http://m.esrx.com>.

- **Express Scripts announced it is rebranding the pharmacy-benefit service it offers to the U.S. military, and will be expanding that service to other federal agencies.**

For the past decade, Express Scripts has served the Department of Defense's 9.7 million beneficiaries in its TRICARE pharmacy program. Express Scripts will call its military program the Federal Pharmacy Services division.

Express Scripts also will expand its pharmacy benefit management offering to other federal agencies. Express Scripts inherited some federal-agency clients from Medco Health Solutions Inc., which it acquired for \$29.1 billion earlier this year.

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) teamed up with American Heart Association (AHA) to raise awareness of heart disease in women, particularly women veterans and VA employees, at a "VA Goes Red" health expo.**

The event, held Sept. 27, in Washington D.C., included healthy cooking demonstrations, fitness classes, health screenings and CPR instruction. VA's Undersecretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey and Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Health, Dr. Robert Jesse, a cardiologist, spoke during the programmed portion.

VA and the AHA announced their collaboration in May. By combining efforts, the organizations can maximize their resources and share *Go Red For Women's* messages and tools with women veterans and VA employees.

The event was held in conjunction with FRESHFARM, a farmer's market, which opened as a result of First Lady Michelle Obama's mission to make healthy food options more accessible to the DC population. It provides an ideal venue to discuss heart disease prevention strategies, which include exercise and healthy eating.

Women serve in every branch of the military, representing 15 percent of today's active duty military and nearly 18 percent of National Guard and Reserve forces. By 2020, VA estimates women veterans will constitute 10 percent of the veteran population.

Visit www.va.gov/womenvet and www.womenshealth.va.gov to learn more about VA programs and services for women veterans.

- **A powerful new tool is available to the entertainment industry with the release of *Picture This: Veteran Mental Health Challenges and Solutions*, a comprehensive guide to assist members of the creative arts community in accurately portraying mental health issues Veterans may experience.**

The Entertainment Industries Council, Inc. (EIC), in collaboration with and sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, developed this guide with input from mental health experts, veterans, advocates, policymakers, the entertainment industry and many others who are committed to honoring the service of veterans and helping them overcome challenges.

Picture This was written to help writers, actors, producers and others create authentic depictions of veterans facing and overcoming mental health challenges. The guide

includes background data on America's veterans and explains terminology on symptoms, conditions and treatment options. Detailed information on mental health topics is accompanied by candid and unscripted accounts of Veterans and their family members who faced difficult life events and experiences, reached out for support, and found resources for getting their lives back on track.

To see the joint VA / Entertainment Industries Council publication, please visit:
<http://www.eiconline.org/eic-resources/publications/national/picture-this/VA-MH>.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) processed over one million disability claims during fiscal year 2012, marking the third year in row VBA claims processors have exceeded the one million mark.**

The VBA oversees the delivery of disability compensation and other benefits to veterans. In August, VA had its most productive claims processing period in its history, completing a record 107,462 claims and surpassing the previous monthly record of 103,296 set in 2010. This high level of production is accompanied by an increase in the overall accuracy of rating decisions, which has risen from 83 to 86 percent since September 2011, as determined by VA's national quality assurance program.

While claims production is at historic highs, incoming disability claims have increased nearly 50 percent since 2008, outpacing VA's current claims processing capacity.

VA's goal is to process all disability claims within 125 days, at a 98 percent accuracy level, and eliminate the claims backlog in 2015.

This year, VBA is beginning a nationwide organizational transformation to increase its claims decision output by retooling procedures and deploying paperless data systems that will speed claims processing and improve quality. All 56 VBA regional offices will be operating under the new organizational model by the end of 2013.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced a new program, designed to boost the number of social workers and psychologists who work with Americans in rural areas, military personnel, veterans and their families.**

Through the *Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training* grant program, \$9.8 million is being awarded to 24 graduate social work and psychology schools and programs for three-year grants. The grants will help eligible institutions of higher education – including accredited schools of social work and psychology and accredited psychology internship programs – to recruit students and provide support for clinical training in mental and behavioral health.

Mental health conditions are among the top five chronic illnesses in the United States. This program addresses a critical need for more mental and behavioral health providers, especially those trained in trauma and abuse, combat-related stress, substance abuse, and the needs of chronically ill people and their families.

To view awardees, visit
<http://www.hrsa.gov/about/news/2012tables/120925mentalandbehavioral.html>.

- **The Department of Health Human Services (HHS) announced the average person with traditional Medicare will save \$5,000 from 2010 to 2022.**

People with Medicare who have high prescription drug costs will save much more than \$18,000 over the same period.

HHS also announced that more than 5.5 million seniors and people with disabilities saved nearly \$4.5 billion on prescription drugs since the Affordable Care Act was enacted. Seniors in the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap known as the donut hole have saved an average of \$641 in the first eight months of 2012 alone. This includes \$195 million in savings on prescriptions for diabetes, over \$140 million on drugs to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and \$75 million on cancer drugs so far this year. Also in the first eight months of 2012, more than 19 million people with original Medicare received at least one preventive service at no cost to them.

The health care law also makes it easier for people with Medicare to obtain many preventive health services at no cost. In 2012, 19 million people with traditional Medicare have received at least one preventive service at no cost to them. This includes 1.9 million who have taken advantage of the Annual Wellness Visit provided by the Affordable Care Act – almost 600,000 more than had used this service by this point in the year in 2011. In 2011, an estimated 32.5 million people with traditional Medicare or Medicare Advantage received one or more preventive benefits free of charge.

For state-by-state information on savings in the donut hole, please visit:
<http://downloads.cms.gov/files/Summary-Chart-2010-2012.pdf>.

For state-by-state information on utilization of free preventive services, please visit:
<http://downloads.cms.gov/files/preventive-services-data.pdf>.

- **The Food and Drug Administration announced the formation of an internal task force that will support the development of new antibacterial drugs, a critical public health care goal and a priority for the agency.**

As part of its work, the Antibacterial Drug Development Task Force will assist in developing and revising guidance related to antibacterial drug development.

Research and development for new antibacterial drugs has been in decline in recent decades, and the number of new FDA-approved antibacterial drugs has been falling steadily since the 1980s. During this time, the persistent and sometimes indiscriminate use of existing antibacterial drugs worldwide has resulted in a decrease in the effectiveness of these drugs. This phenomenon, known as antibacterial drug resistance or antibiotic resistance, has become a serious issue of global concern.

More than 70 percent of the bacteria that cause hospital-associated infections (HAIs) are resistant to at least one type of antibacterial drug most commonly used to treat these infections. In the United States, nearly 2 million Americans developed HAIs in 2002, resulting in about 99,000 deaths.

The task force is a multi-disciplinary group of 19 CDER scientists and clinicians who will use existing partnerships and collaborations to work with other experts in the field, including from academia, industry, professional societies, patient advocacy groups, and government agencies, to identify priority areas and develop and implement possible solutions to the challenges of antibacterial drug development.

The task force is part of FDA's efforts to promote antibacterial drug development and combat antibiotic resistance. Over several years, the agency has provided guidance to industry and hosted public workshops and meetings to address and discuss scientific challenges in the field of antibacterial drug development. The FDA also plays a key role

in working with other federal agencies to implement a national plan to address antibiotic resistance.

For more information: [Antibacterial Drug Development Task Force Roster](#).

- **The National Institutes of Health awarded funds, totaling approximately \$11.3 million, to support the first year of the Health Care Systems (HCS) Research Collaboratory, which will engage health care systems as research partners in conducting large-scale clinical studies.**

These initial awards will develop implementation methods and best practices that will enable multiple health care systems to participate in high impact clinical studies. They also establish a coordinating center that will provide national leadership and technical expertise in all aspects of research with health care systems.

The awards will also support the design and rapid execution of seven high-impact clinical trial demonstration projects. The trials will address several relevant medical conditions that impact health in the United States, such as assessing ways to prevent hospital-acquired infections and ways to improve screening for colon cancer.

The HCS Research Collaboratory will make data, tools and resources from these projects available to the greater research community to facilitate a broadened base of research partnerships with health care systems.

To view the awardees, please visit: <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/sep2012/nccam-25.htm>.

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced seven cooperative agreement awards partnering with 145 nursing facilities to implement the Initiative to Reduce Avoidable Hospitalizations among Nursing Facility Residents.**

The initiative will test models to improve the quality of care and help reduce avoidable hospitalizations among nursing facility residents by funding organizations that provide enhanced on-site services and supports to nursing facility residents.

Nearly two-thirds of nursing facility residents are enrolled in Medicaid, and most are also enrolled in Medicare. These Medicare-Medicaid enrollees are among the most fragile and chronically ill individuals served by the programs. Research found that approximately 45 percent of hospitalizations among Medicare-Medicaid enrollees receiving either Medicare skilled nursing facility services or Medicaid nursing facility services could have been avoided. Total costs for these potentially avoidable hospitalizations for Medicare-Medicaid enrollees for 2011 were estimated to be between \$7 and 8 billion.

Through the Initiative, CMS will partner with seven organizations to improve care for long-stay nursing facility residents. These organizations will collaborate with nursing facilities and State Medicaid programs to provide better quality of care in nursing facilities.

For a list of the organizations involved or get more information, please visit: <http://innovations.cms.gov/initiatives/rahnfr/>.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Medical Devices: FDA Should Expand Its Consideration of Information Security for Certain Types of Devices,” (GAO-12-816) on Sept. 27, 2012.** In this report, GAO identifies the threats, vulnerabilities and resulting information security risks associated with active implantable medical devices; determines the extent to which FDA considered information security during its premarket review of certain devices with known vulnerabilities; and determines what post-market efforts FDA has in place to identify information security problems. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/647767.pdf>
- **The Institute of Medicine published “Fitness Measures and Health Outcomes in Youth,” on Sept. 27, 2012.** This report assesses the relationship between youth fitness test items and health outcomes, recommends the best fitness test items, provides guidance for interpreting fitness scores, and provides an agenda for needed research. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/Fitness-Measures-and-Health-Outcomes-in-Youth.aspx>
- **The GAO published “Defense Health Care: Additional Analysis of Costs and Benefits of Potential Governance Structures Is Needed,” (GAO-12-911) on Sept. 26, 2012.** In this report, GAO recommends that DOD develop a comprehensive cost analysis for its potential MHS governance options; a business case analysis and strategy for implementing its shared services concept and more complete analyses of the options' strengths and weaknesses. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/650/648807.pdf>

HILL HEARINGS

- There are no hearings scheduled.

LEGISLATION

- No legislation was proposed this week.

MEETINGS

- 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 23rd Annual Symposium for the Health Facility Institute will be held **Oct. 21-24, 2012**, in Englewood, Colo. www.hfi.org
- The American Public Health Association (APHA) 140th 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) 28th 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
- 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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