

# 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 Senate and House are in recess until Nov. 12 and 14, 2016, respectively.**

## MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Military Health System is highlighting the efforts of Health Affairs Women's Health working group.**

Comprised of experts from the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs, the group addresses health-related concerns, needs and issues affecting a growing body of women both in the military and as they transition to VA.

The working group's mission is to ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to the health needs of a woman – from entry into the military to status as a veteran. The group attempts to identify trends and what's going on across the life cycle of our soldiers, airmen and seamen by sharing data and health perspectives from DoD and VA to identify gaps that must be filled.

Women have specific needs that are different from those of men including the unique hygiene needs of women in a field environment. For example, contraception is a major topic for the

group, but other areas of discussion include cancer screenings and reproductive and gynecological needs.

The group is response-oriented based on issues that have come forward from beneficiaries and Congress. Through collaboration with the VA, the group will be able to gain a better understanding of the needs of women transitioning out of service, which will then impact the education and initiatives being provided to women now in the service.

- **TRICARE highlighted the importance of health literacy.**

Health literacy means how well you understand your basic health information and services available to you. According to Health.gov, nearly nine out of ten adults may lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease.

TRICARE recommends people should know or have a copy of their health history, prior hospitalizations and a list of current and past medical problems. They also need to know if you're having new problems or never received relief from prior symptoms. This is especially important if they are seeing several doctors at the same time or meeting a new one.

In addition:

- People should make sure they have the latest copies of test results, x-rays, labs or any other work they have had done
- They should have a list of all your current medication - prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and herbal supplements, as well as the dosage.
- People should also write a list of the top three to five issues they want to discuss with your doctor to stay on track and ensure their concerns are addressed.
- It is important to know their health care benefit, including knowing what their insurance covers; their copays or cost-shares. Knowing details about their health care benefit helps when it's time to make decisions about choosing a provider or specialist, getting important tests, and when planning preventive care.

For more information about your TRICARE health plan, visit [www.tricare.mil/plans](http://www.tricare.mil/plans).

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **USA Today reports more than 185,000 Department of Veterans Affairs' employees received more than \$177 million in bonuses for fiscal 2015.**

In fiscal year 2015, \$3.3 million in bonuses was distributed to over 300 senior executives.

Among those receiving bonuses was the former top VA official in Ohio who retired the same day he received a notice he was going to be fired. Another was the former chief of staff at the Phoenix VA Medical Center who received a bonus four months before he was fired.

More than half the agency's employees received a bonus, again raising concerns about the performance review process used to evaluate workers. Plus, the number of employees receiving bonuses jumped by more than 20 percent from 2014 and the total amount paid out increased by 24 percent.

Among those receiving bonuses were:

- Dr. Darren Deering, who was fired as chief of staff of the Phoenix VA Health Care System in June 2016 for what the VA said was "negligent performance of duties and failure to provide effective oversight." Deering was paid a \$5,000 bonus in February 2016.
- Jack Hetrick, formerly the top Veterans Affairs official in Ohio, received a bonus of more

than \$10,000 in January 2016. He then retired after receiving a notice of pending removal in February 2016 .

- Stella S. Fiotes has been executive director of VA's Office of Construction and Facilities Management since January 2013. She is responsible for planning, design and construction of major construction projects, including the replacement VA facility in Denver that was hundreds of millions of dollars over budget. In 2015 and 2016, she received bonuses totaling more than \$18,000.

## GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced open enrollment in the Health Insurance Marketplaces began on Nov. 1, 2016.**

Since the Marketplaces opened for business, they've helped drive the national uninsured rate down to historic low after historic low: it reached 8.6 percent in the first quarter of 2016, down from 16.3 percent in 2010.

HHS is encouraging Americans to take a fresh look at their options, because on the Marketplace, shopping for a better deal pays off. This year, the average consumer will be able to choose from 30 plans, with an average of 10 plans per issuer. More than 7 in 10 current Marketplace consumers could save by coming back to shop instead of re-enrolling in their current plan. If every returning consumer nationwide selected the lowest-cost plan within the same metal level, average premiums paid would fall by \$28 per month – 20 percent – compared to 2016, after factoring in financial assistance.

This year, HealthCare.gov will be piloting and then phasing in further improvements to make the shopping experience more intuitive and streamlined, particularly for users who access the site from their mobile phones. This new Plan Compare 2.0 will offer a simpler, step-by-step sign-up process that integrates improved physician and drug look-up tools directly into the shopping experience.

Open Enrollment continues through Jan. 31, 2017, with a December 15<sup>th</sup> deadline for January 1<sup>st</sup> coverage. Thirty-nine states are using the federal HealthCare.gov platform this year; 11 states and D.C. use [their own](#) Marketplace websites. For enrollment assistance, consumers can call 1-800-318-2596 or visit [localhelp.healthcare.gov](http://localhelp.healthcare.gov).

- **The Health Resources and Services Administration announced the availability of \$39 million for health centers in Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands to expand the availability of preventive and primary health care services to meet immediate and anticipated Zika-related health care needs and enable health centers to expand services in response to other urgent and emergent primary health care needs.**

Zika virus infection during pregnancy is a cause of microcephaly and other severe brain defects. Zika virus infection during pregnancy has also been linked to pregnancy loss and other adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes. As of Oct. 26, 2016, more than 32,000 laboratory-confirmed cases of Zika have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from the U.S. states (4,091 cases) and territories (28,723 cases).

This \$39 million in funding will specifically be made available for use over a 3-year period to eligible Health Center Program-funded health centers in these territories.

Nearly 1,400 health centers operating over 9,800 sites provide care to more than 24 million people across this nation, in every U.S. state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the Pacific Basin. Today, health centers employ nearly 190,000 people.

For more information on the U.S. efforts to combat the Zika virus, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/zika/>.

To learn more about HRSA's Health Center Program, visit <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/about/index.html>.

To find a health center in your area, visit <http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>.

## REPORTS/POLICIES

- There were no relevant reports published this week.

## HILL HEARINGS

- There are no hearings scheduled next week.

## LEGISLATION

- There was no legislation introduced this week.

## MEETINGS

- 2016 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting will be held on **Nov. 29- Dec. 2, 2016**, at the Gaylord National Harbor, Md. <http://www.amsusmeetings.org/>
- The Society of Military Orthopaedic Surgeons 58th Annual Meeting 2016 will be held **Dec. 12-16, 2016**, in Olympic Valley, Calif. <http://www.somos.org/>
- HIMSS 2017 Annual Conference will be held on **Feb. 19-23, 2017**, in Orlando, Fla. <http://www.himssconference.org/>
- The 7th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held **May 24-25, 2017**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>

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