

Federal Health Update

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Happy Holidays!

The Update will not be published on Dec. 26 and Jan.2, 2014.

EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **On Dec. 16, 2014, President Obama signed into law H.R. 83, the "Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015."** This legislation provides fiscal year 2015 full-year appropriations through Sept. 30, 2015 for all agencies except the Department of Homeland Security, for which appropriations are provided instead through Feb. 27, 2015.

- **On Dec. 16, 2014, President Obama signed into law:**
 - H.R. 3375, designating the community-based outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs to be constructed at 3141 Centennial Boulevard, Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the PFC Floyd K. Lindstrom Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic; and
 - H.R. 3682, designating the community-based outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 1961 Premier Drive in Mankato, Minnesota, as the Lyle C. Pearson Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

- **On Dec. 15, 2014, the Senate confirmed Vivek Hallegere Murthy to be Surgeon General.**

Murthy is the first Indian-American to be appointed U.S. Surgeon General. Vivek Murthy, M.D., M.B.A. is an attending physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School where he is an internal medicine hospitalist. He is also co-founder and president of Doctors for America, a grassroots organization of more than 15,000 doctors and medical students in 50 states who are working to build a high-quality, affordable health care system for all Americans.

In 2011 Dr. Murthy was appointed by President Barack Obama to the National Advisory Group on Prevention, Health Promotion, and Integrative and Public Health where he has worked on developing the National Prevention Strategy. He has lectured widely on health care reform and physician advocacy, and his writings and research have been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, or JAMA; *Science*; the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*; and *The Washington Post*. Dr. Murthy's past research has focused on the participation of women and minorities in cancer clinical trials. Dr. Murthy is also the co-founder and chairman of Epernicus, LLC and its subsidiary TrialNetworks, which build social networking platforms for life sciences companies and clinical trials.

Dr. Murthy received his B.A. from Harvard University, his M.D. from the Yale School of Medicine, his M.B.A. from the Yale School of Management, and his residency training in internal medicine from Brigham and Women's Hospital. He is a native of Miami, Florida, and currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences has established new program, providing an in-resident opportunity for uniquely qualified enlisted members to complete preparatory coursework for medical school application while maintaining their active-duty status.**

The Enlisted to Medical Degree Preparatory Program, or EMDP2, officially got underway in the fall, with an inaugural class of 10. Today, the class participated in a ceremony to celebrate the end of its first semester.

The program was created to give handpicked, highly promising enlisted personnel from the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps an opportunity to become officers and physicians.

EMDP2 comprises a two-year regimen of traditional classroom instruction, structured pre-health advising, formal Medical College Admission Test preparation, dedicated faculty and peer mentoring, and integrated clinical exposure.

EMDP2 was created based on the premise that many service members who may not have performed exceptionally in high school but went on to get their undergraduate degree still faced an "enormous hurdle" to get into any medical school. Studying in multiple settings, between deployments, while serving full-time, makes it difficult for active-duty members to complete the science prerequisites and other preparation that would ensure acceptance to medical school.

According to program officials, the first class is doing "extremely well," with a combined grade point average of 3.9.

- **Soldiers from the 20th CBRNE Command (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosives), were part of Time Magazine's selection for the 2014 Person of the Year.**

Time Magazine selected "Ebola fighters" as its 2014 Person of the Year, and Soldiers from the 20th CBRNE Command's 1st Area Medical Laboratory, or AML, in West Africa are a part of the U.S. effort to contain the most deadly Ebola outbreak in history.

The 1st AML deployed from here to Liberia, in late October, for Operation United Assistance.

"The 1st AML brings unique capabilities to our nation's efforts in support of this mission, and is playing an important role in enabling the understanding of this disease as a part of a larger joint and inter-agency enterprise," said 20th CBRNE Commanding General Brig. Gen. JB Burton, a native of Tullahoma, Tenn.

In support of combined and joint military operations, 1st AML deploys around the globe to protect U.S. military forces through surveillance and testing of environmental samples to determine threats and environmental health hazards.

A specialized and highly-trained team of soldier scientists who serve as microbiologists, biochemists and laboratory specialists, 1st AML previously served in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Based in Maryland's science, technology and security corridor on Aberdeen Proving Ground, the 20th CBRNE is the U.S. Department of Defense's only formation that combats chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive threats around the world.

- **On Dec. 11, 2014, the Defense Department released the quarterly suicide report for April through June of 2014, and the numbers, officials said, indicate a drop from first-quarter statistics for all services and components.**

The second-quarter report summary showed 70 suicides among active duty service members, 14 suicides among Reserve component service members and 20 suicides among National Guardsmen.

Jacqueline Garrick, acting director of the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, said the decline could be attributable to the Defense Department's vigilant efforts to better understand and identify at-risk service members and veterans, greater collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and increased peer-to-peer, online and telephone counseling resources.

Still, Garrick noted fear of career damage remains one of the major obstacles between veterans in crisis and the path to treatment and counseling.

"The goal is to eliminate the stigma of getting help," she said. "So there's been an increase in first-level, peer-to-peer groups, which have made a difference in enabling people who fear they may be jeopardizing their career to reach out for care."

As the drawdown continues in Afghanistan, Garrick noted that while post-traumatic stress disorder is a common reaction to the rigors of deployments, recent wars are less relevant to current statistics than many realize.

"Just over half of service members who've attempted or died as a result of suicide have been deployed and less than 15 percent of that number had been in actual combat," she said. "Far more common reasons for suicide are financial problems, relationship issues, depression or abuse."

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control listed suicide as the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. That year, there were 38,364 suicides -- an average of 105 each day.

Garrick asserts that seeking help is a sign of strength, treatment works, and myriad resources remain available to current and former service members and their families.

"The problems that go unresolved only get worse and we know those have greater impacts on your life, your career, on your family," she said. "So we would encourage anybody to intervene and act early -- that's the notion behind the power of one: everybody has the power to save a life."

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has launched a two-year pilot to study innovative approaches to quickly search electronic medical records and medical literature for relevant published studies.**

During the pilot, VA will assess how the technology may accelerate evidence-based clinical decisions.

The IBM Corporation was selected to provide the system, which uses its “Watson technology” made famous on Jeopardy! in 2011. Today, IBM is working with several healthcare organizations to apply Watson's cognitive capabilities in helping doctors identify and analyze cancer treatment options. Learning about the opportunities and challenges these next-generation technologies may have is part of an ongoing effort for VA to advance the quality of healthcare provided to veterans. During the pilot, clinical decisions will not be made on actual patient encounters, but instead will use realistic simulations.

The notice can be found at <https://www.fbo.gov/notices/1e9767c0e2880cf2e4ce98f75b113efa>.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **To reach more Americans this open enrollment season, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has collaborated with top technology companies [Monster.com](#), [Peers.org](#) and [higi](#) to use their technology platforms to encourage consumers to visit the Health Insurance Marketplace.**

Monster, Peers, and higi reach a wide audience of consumers, and the companies have committed to share enrollment information with their audiences.

HHS is collaborating with Monster.com to provide content on open enrollment to job-seekers through their online platform. The Health Insurance Marketplace provides job-seekers without employer-sponsored insurance affordable, quality health insurance options. Posting information about open enrollment on Monster.com connects job-seekers with those coverage options while they seek new employment opportunities.

Peers wants to make the sharing economy a better work opportunity, by making it easier for workers to find, compare and manage work in the sharing economy. The Health Insurance Marketplace gives Americans the flexibility to start their own business without relying on employer-based insurance. Because people who work in the sharing economy are micro-entrepreneurs, by partnering with Peers, HHS can provide affordable, quality health insurance information to the Peers community. Peers has [posted information](#) on their website about how to enroll on Healthcare.gov and will host a live video chat with an HHS official to answer questions from the Peers community.

Higi, a kiosk-based health engagement platform, has placed engaging Marketplace Open Enrollment messaging on the overhead screens of their interactive stations tracking key health vitals (eg: Blood Pressure, BMI, Weight, Body Fat, etc.) located in the pharmacy area of 2,000 Kroger, 1,000 Super Valu/Albertson's, and 250 Meijer stores nationally. The messaging was posted Dec.5 and will remain throughout Open Enrollment. The organization also plans on adding additional locations as inventory becomes available.

Consumers can sign up for an affordable health plan that meets their needs and fits their budget at [HealthCare.gov](#). Many may even qualify for financial assistance. Open enrollment in the Insurance Marketplace runs through Feb. 15, 2015.

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released its responses to the 10**

most important public-health challenges of 2014:

Mission: New Infectious Disease Threats

- With 170 staff in the field and more than 700 people working on Ebola at any one time, CDC's response to the ongoing Ebola outbreak in West Africa is the largest in the agency's history.
- CDC has made important progress against antibiotic resistance, but it remains a serious threat. Combatting antibiotic resistance and preventing healthcare-associated infections remains a critical initiative for 2015.
- Enterovirus D-68 (EV-D68) is a previously rare virus mostly affecting American children, and is particularly severe in children with asthma. CDC's intense investigations into EV-D68 have been sped by a CDC-developed rapid lab test that can detect the virus.
- Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), a new viral respiratory illness that was first reported in Saudi Arabia in 2012, showed a dramatic increase in cases during 2014.

Mission: Continued Fight against Infectious Diseases:

- The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to be one of the world's most important public health challenges. CDC is a primary partner in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provides support to more than 60 countries to build capacity for their national HIV/AIDS programs. Through PEPFAR, CDC has helped support life-saving antiretroviral treatment for 7.7 million people and supported HIV testing and counseling for more than 56.7 million people during fiscal year 2014.
- The world is on the brink of eliminating polio, but we risk losing hard-won ground.

Mission: Laboratory Safety

- Laboratory incidents during 2014 raised national awareness of the importance of laboratory safety. CDC applied important lessons learned to ensuring its laboratories are safe and effective.

Mission: Leading Causes of Death

- Nearly 800,000 Americans die each year from cardiovascular diseases. In 2014, with support of key partners, the Million Hearts® campaign encouraged widespread adoption and use of standardized treatment protocols for improving blood pressure control.
- Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, killing more than 480,000 Americans each year. In 2014, CDC continued its national tobacco education campaign -- Tips from Former Smokers -- with hard-hitting new ads featuring secondary health conditions people may not realize are related to smoking.
- A silent epidemic of fatal overdose kills 44 people every day in the US. In 2014 CDC joined with partners to improve prescription monitoring, reducing unnecessary prescriptions.

- **The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced the membership of the [Pharmacy Compounding Advisory Committee](#).**

The committee is comprised of 14 members - 12 voting and two non-voting - who will provide advice on scientific, technical and medical issues concerning drug compounding under [sections 503A and 503B](#) of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Chairman Jurgen Venitz, MD, PhD, associate professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University, will lead the 14-member committee. The members are experts in pharmaceutical compounding and manufacturing, pharmacy, medicine, and pharmaceutical regulation. The FDA solicited nominations for committee members, and more than 100 individuals were nominated. The FDA also identified some qualified candidates from its own pool of special government employees.

The committee includes voting members representing the United States Pharmacopeia (USP), a nonprofit organization that sets standards for the identity, strength, quality, and purity of medicines manufactured, distributed and consumed worldwide; the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), a professional organization that supports the state boards of pharmacy in protecting public health; and one member identified with consumer interests. Two non-voting members represent the pharmacy compounding industry and the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry.

Candidates not representing a particular group were evaluated for conflicts of interest and to determine whether their qualifications matched the required areas of expertise.

To view the committee members, please visit

<http://www.fda.gov/AdvisoryCommittees/CommitteesMeetingMaterials/Drugs/PharmacyCompoundingAdvisoryCommittee/ucm381301.htm>.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Health Care: Information on Coverage Choices for Servicemembers, Former Servicemembers, and Dependents,” (GAO-15-4) on Dec. 12, 2014.** In this report, GAO examined eligibility for coverage; the key benefits offered by this coverage and the individuals' costs; the extent to which information on exchange-purchased coverage and federal subsidies is provided by DOD and VA; and the extent to which these individuals have coverage through DOD, VA, Medicare, and Medicaid.

<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/667488.pdf>

- **The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) published “Comparing the Costs of the Veterans' Health Care System with Private-Sector Costs,” on Dec. 11, 2014.** In this report, CBO describes some of the features that distinguish the health care system run by VHA from health care provided in the private sector. It also examines the available evidence about the relative costs of VHA and private-sector care and explores possible reasons why costs might differ in the two settings and why they can be difficult to compare. Finally, CBO briefly considers some factors that could influence the cost-effectiveness of alternative means of expanding health care services to veterans in the future.

<http://www.cbo.gov/publication/49763>

HILL HEARINGS

- There are no hearings scheduled next week.

LEGISLATION

- There was no legislation proposed this year.

MEETINGS

- The AAMA 2015: The National Summit of Medical Administrators will be held on **Jan. 19-21, 2015**, in Clearwater, Fla. <http://aameda.org/p/cm/ld/fid=159>
- The ACHE Congress on Healthcare Leadership will be held on **March 16-19, 2015**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.ache.org/congress/>
- The 12th Annual World Health Care Congress will be held on **March 22-25, 2015**, in Washington DC. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR15000/>
- The HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition will be held on **April 12-16, 2015**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.himssconference.org/>
- The 5th Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Conference will be held **April 15-16, 2015**, in Washington DC. <http://tbiconference.com/home/>
- The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 7, 2015**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org/heroes-dinner>
- 2015 AMSUS Annual Continuing Education Meeting - The Society Of The Federal Health Professionals will be held on **Dec. 1-4, 2015**, in San Antonio, Texas. <http://amsusmeetings.org/annual-meeting/>

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