

FEDERAL HEALTH UPDATE

April 6, 2007

Produced by Kate Connelly Theroux in collaboration with the U.S. Medicine Institute for Health Studies

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Congressional Schedule

- The House is in recess until April 13, 2007.
- The Senate is in recess until April 10, 2007.
- On March 29, 2007, the Senate confirmed Dr. S. Ward Casscells, MD, without opposition to be the next assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

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Military Health Care News

- On April 4, 2007, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced that it has partnered with Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration to pursue an interoperable network for sharing electronic medical information. This marks the first time that DoD has formed a network with and a non-federal entity to share electronic medical records. This pilot collaboration between DoD and Florida is a model initiative to create a mechanism to share and exchange personal health information and data. Through this relationship, state health care providers who treat current and former military personnel and their families will have an opportunity to electronically access and exchange personal health information about their patients. When fully implemented, this initiative will improve providers' ability to access and share information that may be used to treat uniformed and retired personnel at DoD and non-military locations.

This new partnership between the State of Florida and the DoD will be executed through the Tampa Bay Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO), a state- and privately-funded entity. The location of this pilot project will be the Tampa Bay area, with the Tampa Bay RHIO taking the lead in developing the interface with AHLTA, the Military Health System's (MHS) electronic health record system.

The MHS has approximately 700,000 beneficiaries who are residents or part-time residents of Florida, in addition to a large number of beneficiaries who visit the state and may find themselves in need of healthcare during their visit. Because of the

comprehensiveness of the clinical data AHLTA collects, and because of the high number of active duty and retired military and their dependents living in or visiting the state of Florida, DoD has the ability to provide vital information to Florida's physicians to assist them with the care they provide service members and their families, while at the same time stimulating the further development of Florida's health information technology network and its ability to share electronic health information.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=10695>

- The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) TRICARE Retail Pharmacy (TRRx) program received the Pharmacy Benefit Management Institute's 2007 Rx Benefit Innovation award for its online, real-time coordination of benefits (COB) program, which is managed by Express Scripts and other DoD contractors. Express Scripts is one of the nation's largest pharmacy benefit management companies.

The COB program simplifies the reimbursement process for beneficiaries who have drug benefit coverage with multiple sources and saves money for the DoD. The implementation of the online COB program allows pharmacies to submit both primary and secondary coverage online for TRICARE beneficiaries, resulting in the beneficiary incurring little or no out-of-pocket expenses. Prior to the COB program, TRRx beneficiaries would have to pay for expenses not covered by their primary health insurance and then file a manual claim after the fact for reimbursement under TRICARE for their secondary coverage. About 9.1 million TRICARE beneficiaries, consisting of active-duty and retired military personnel, have access to a nation-wide retail pharmacy network provided by Express Scripts. http://stlouis.dbusinessnews.com/shownews.php?newsid=113922&type_news=latest

- According to a New York Times article, the failure to use a Department of Defense (DoD) digital medical records system has led to medical errors and delayed care. The system, called the Joint Patient Tracking Application, was developed in 2004 to allow military officials and physicians to track the medical care given to troops from war zone hospitals to hospitals in the U.S. The system is designed to give doctors or other personnel access to clinical data and tests. However, only 13 of 70 military treatment facilities in the U.S. are using the system, despite a mandate from the Pentagon requiring that they do so. As a result, military doctors say they are less able to learn from mistakes since they cannot track the progress of wounded soldiers from one location to another, while others complain of costly and redundant testing. Tony DeNicola, who formerly was in charge of implementing the digital system for DoD, said, "We couldn't get the services to use the system because they wanted to use their own. We also never got enough cooperation from the office in charge of electronic patient records." DeNicola noted that some veterans might not be receiving a monthly \$430 check for combat-related injury rehabilitation because the money is distributed based on data from the digital system. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/30/washington/30medical.html?_r=2&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&ref=health&adxnnlx=1175814669-

[N3btglqN0GRZTFoSobEmfA](#)

- Health Net Federal Services (HNFS) announced it sponsored the [21st Annual National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic](#). Hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Disabled Americans Veterans (DAV), the clinic occurred April 1 - 6, 2007, in Snowmass Village, Colo. Health Net's managed behavioral health division, MHN Government Services, sponsored onsite counselors who offered free support services for participating veterans and their families, as they face the challenges of reintegration with a permanent disability.

U.S. military veterans receiving care at VA facilities with spinal cord injuries or disease, visual impairments, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations or other disabilities were eligible to participate in the event. The six-day clinic exposed veterans to adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing and a variety of other adaptive activities and sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, snowmobiling and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service taught a course on self-defense for people with disabilities.

<http://www.genengnews.com/news/bnitem.aspx?name=15201936>

- Service members returning from the war in Iraq, now have a new resource to help them and their family members deal with the unique set of re-adjustment challenges they face. In a proactive approach to preventing, identifying and treating post deployment issues, TriWest Healthcare Alliance launched an interactive behavioral health resource map on www.triwest.com where visitors simply click on their state and view a list of National and local, civilian and military behavioral health resources. This provides a fast and easy way to get help and information to those who need it no matter what time of day or where they are located.

Beneficiaries who need help or know of someone who needs help - from emotional support, to counseling, financial help, or other family support - should visit the Behavioral Health portal which features tools to pinpoint and address common military behavioral health issues, including PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and much more. TriWest recently expanded the portal to include a focus on Child/Adolescent issues, including information on depression, sleep, ADHD and other behavioral health problems a child or teen may experience as a result of a parent's military deployment.

As part of their Help from Home program, the Behavioral Health Portal is only one of the ways TriWest is helping Service members and their families deal with the pressures of serving our nation. Help from Home proactively addresses the daunting challenge of helping military Service members and their families cope with deployment-related issues. In particular, National Guard and Reserve

members and their families often have limited access to behavioral health resources that are otherwise available to their active duty counterparts. Help from Home integrates several distinct, yet integrated programs designed to educate, assist and expedite support, such as National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness centers; provider education seminars about combat stress identification and treatment; sponsorship of emotionally supportive summer camps for children of deployed Service members; a variety of behavioral health pilot programs; free Getting Home DVDs with post-deployment readjustment advice and information.

<http://www.navycompass.com/news/newsview.asp?c=209798>

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Veterans Health Care News

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released findings from its ground-breaking research that proved that, in treating less severe kinds of heart disease, drug therapy is just as effective as a common form of cardiac surgery. The research, involving nearly 2,300 patients at 15 VA medical centers and 35 other facilities in the United States and Canada, compared standard cardiac drug treatments to a surgical procedure called “angioplasty,” in which clogged arteries are kept open by wire-mesh tubes. Patients receiving angioplasty also received medication to lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol and prevent clots.

After five years, the study found equal rates of mortality, non-fatal heart attacks, strokes and hospitalizations in patients receiving angioplasty and medication, compared to those who received only medication. The results were published recently in the New England Journal of Medicine. Researchers noted that all of the patients in the study were listed as having “stable” heart disease. Other studies have shown angioplasty can help patients with more severe heart disease. VA researchers played key roles in developing the cardiac pacemaker, improving artificial limbs, conducting the first liver transplant, and developing new treatments for tuberculosis, schizophrenia and high blood pressure.

Last year, VA was responsible for more than \$1.6 billion in medical research. Because seven out of every 10 VA researchers are also involved in direct patient care, the Department is uniquely able to translate the latest findings into changes in health care for patients. VA medical facilities are affiliated with 107 medical schools. <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1317>

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Health Care News

- On April 3, 2007, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions and Healthways released a report, [*“Embracing Health: Tools and Systems for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention,”*](http://digital50.com/news/items/BW/2001/07/14/20070403006055/physicians-health-policy-experts-call-for-a-national-health-system-focused-on-preven/print) which was created from the consensus of more than 200 physicians, healthcare thought leaders, policymakers, patients and payers. The report recommends the development of a comprehensive national system devoted to preventing the onset of disease. The health and financial benefits of prevention are well established. Centers for Disease Control statistics show that for every dollar spent on arthritis self-help programs, \$3.42 was saved in physician hospital costs; for every dollar spent on preconception care for diabetic women, \$1.86 was saved in the prevention of birth defects; among adults at high risk for heart attack, daily aspirin regimen saved 80,000 lives annually; and influenza vaccination saved \$117 per person vaccinated. The report outlines barriers to adopting preventive services in the current healthcare system, as well as opportunities under a new, preventive health model. <http://digital50.com/news/items/BW/2001/07/14/20070403006055/physicians-health-policy-experts-call-for-a-national-health-system-focused-on-preven/print>
- On April 2, 2007, NIH Director Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D. named Barbara Alving, M.D. to be the director of the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR). As Acting Director of NCRR, Alving has overseen the launch of the Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) program—a new national consortium of academic health centers that will transform the conduct of clinical and translational research to ensure that biomedical discoveries are rapidly translated into prevention strategies and clinical treatments for rare and common diseases.
- On April 2, 2007, Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), announced the appointment of Griffin P. Rodgers, M.D., as director of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), effective April 1, 2007.
- On April 2, 2007, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., has resigned after serving in this position since 2001. Under his leadership, HHS passed and implemented the next chapter of welfare reform; launched the first-ever healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grants; began outreach to victims of human trafficking; helped increase the number of adoptions in America, connected children of prisoners with

mentors, and created a strong partnership with faith-based organizations.

- On April 4, 2007, former HHS secretary and four-term governor of Wisconsin Tommy Thompson officially announced his candidacy for president, meeting in Clive, Wisconsin with about 200 supporters.
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the posting of detailed specifications for the 74 measures included in the [2007 Physician Quality Reporting Initiative \(PQRI\)](#). PQRI establishes a financial incentive for physicians and other health practitioners to participate in a voluntary quality reporting program. Eligible professionals who successfully report data for a designated set of quality measures may earn a bonus payment, subject to a cap, of 1.5 percent of total allowed charges for covered Medicare physician fee schedule services provided during the reporting period of July 1, 2007 to Dec. 31, 2007.

The 2007 PQRI quality measures relate to important processes of care that are linked to improved healthcare quality outcomes. They are evidence- and consensus-based measures that reflect the work of national organizations involved in quality measure development, consensus endorsement, and adoption. These include the American Medical Association Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement, the National Committee for Quality Assurance, the National Quality Forum, the AQA Alliance, and other physician and non-physician professional organizations. The professional organizations are also assisting CMS in providing PQRI education and assistance to their members.

The PQRI measures apply to services that eligible professionals provide to Medicare beneficiaries in their offices and other settings. CMS is implementing an extensive outreach and education plan to assist eligible professionals to understand the program and the measures and to implement processes to efficiently capture the quality data that is to be reported under the PQRI program. [CMS NR 4-3-07](#)

- On April 4, 2007, the White house announced that President Bush intends to nominate Michael J. Kussman, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary for Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs, for a four-year term. Dr. Kussman currently serves as Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs. On August 12, 2006 he assumed the role of Acting Under Secretary for Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Earlier in his career, he served as Chief of Patient Care Services at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Dr. Kussman retired from the United States Army in September of 2000, having reached the final rank of Brigadier General. Dr. Kussman received his bachelor's degree and his MD from Boston University. He also received his

master's degree from Salve Regina University.

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Reserve/Guard

- The total number of Guard and Reserve currently on active duty has **increased** by 62 from the last report to 79,958. The totals for each service are Army National Guard and Army Reserve, 62,785; Navy Reserve, 6,319; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 5,009; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,542; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 303. www.defenselink.mil

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Contracts/Procurements

- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a Sources Sought notice for contractors who can support them in achieving the goal of providing unique and quality assured influenza-related reagents and resources in support of the development of clinical diagnostic products and vaccines for human influenza virus to meet clinical and public health needs. In order to accomplish this goal, researchers and developers need open access to standardized reference viral materials that are not widely available. This program will provide quality-assured reagents and resources to aid in the development, evaluation, validation and testing of influenza diagnostics and vaccines. The contractor who develops the Influenza Virus Library (IVL) under this potential contract will coordinate access to these reagents.

The potential IVL contractor will acquire, propagate, characterize, provide quality control and store reference reagents; assemble standardized panels and establish and implement a system to oversee and manage the distribution of viruses and reagents to researchers and developers of influenza vaccines and influenza virus diagnostic products approved by the CDC Project Officer; and disseminate public information concerning reagent availability and technical assistance. These reagents include human influenza, low and highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses and their derivatives, as well as other microbial respiratory pathogens associated with influenza-like illness. Any work with live wild-type highly pathogenic influenza H5N1 viruses must be conducted in a USDA-approved Biosafety Level 3 -Enhanced containment facility. All interested parties should respond by April 12, 2007.

<http://www.fbo.gov/spg/HHS/CDCP/PGOA/Reference-Number-2007-N-IVL/SynopsisR.html>

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Reports/Policies

- The GAO published “*Disability Programs: SSA Has Taken Steps to Address Conflicting Court Decisions, but Needs to Manage Data Better on the Increasing Number of Court Remands,*” (GAO-07-331) on April 5, 2007. In the report, the GAO was asked to examine trends over the past decade in the number of appeals reviewed by the courts and their decisions;) reasons for court remands and factors contributing to them; and SSA's process for responding to court decisions that conflict with agency policy. GAO reviewed SSA data and documents on court decisions, remands and SSA's processes and interviewed agency officials and stakeholders on data trends, reasons for remands, and SSA processes.

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07331.pdf>

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued “*The Learning Healthcare System: Workshop Summary,*” on April 2, 2007. This report is a summary of an Institute of Medicine workshop, *The Learning Healthcare System*,; the first publication of the IOM Roundtable on Evidence-Based Medicine; and the first in a series that will focus on issues important to improving the development and application of evidence in healthcare decision making. The Roundtable serves as a neutral venue for cooperative work among key stakeholders on several dimensions: to help transform the availability and use of the best evidence for the collaborative health care choices of each patient and provider; to drive the process of discovery as a natural outgrowth of patient care; and to ensure innovation, quality, safety, and value in health care. <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/28312/RT-EBM/41894.aspx>

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued “*PEPFAR Implementation: Progress and Promise,*” on April 2, 2007. This report is the IOM’s evaluation of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which is the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act (FY2003), establishing a five-year, \$15 billion initiative to help countries around the world respond to their AIDS epidemics. <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3783/24770/41804.aspx>

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Legislation

- **H.RES.288** (introduced March 29, 2007): Recognizing that the occurrence of prostate cancer in African-American men has reached epidemic proportions and urging Federal agencies to address that health crisis by designating additional funds for research, education, awareness outreach, and early detection was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Gregory W. Meeks [NY-6]
- **H.R.1802** (introduced March 29, 2007): To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a refundable tax credit to small businesses for the costs of qualified health insurance was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Darlene Hooley [OR-5]
- **H.R.1812** (introduced March 29, 2007): To provide for coverage of hormone replacement therapy for treatment of menopausal symptoms, and for coverage of an alternative therapy for hormone replacement therapy for such symptoms, under the Medicare and Medicaid Programs, group health plans and individual health insurance coverage, and other Federal health insurance programs was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committees on Ways and Means, Education and Labor, Oversight and Government Reform, and Veterans' Affairs, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
Sponsor: Representative Barbara Lee [CA-9]
- **H.R.1820** (introduced March 29, 2007): To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the exclusion from gross income for employer-provided health coverage for employees' spouses and dependent children to coverage provided to other eligible designated beneficiaries of employees was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Jim McDermott [WA-7]
- **H.R.1841** (introduced March 29, 2007): To amend the Social Security Act and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for an AmeriCare that assures the provision of health insurance coverage to all residents, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committees on Ways and Means, and Education and Labor, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction

of the committee concerned.

Sponsor: Representative Fortney Pete Stark [CA-13].

- **S.1022** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend title XXI of the Social Security Act to eliminate the remainder of funding shortfalls for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for fiscal year 2007, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Finance.

Sponsor: Senator Saxby Chambliss [GA]

- **S.1023** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend title XXI of the Social Security Act to eliminate the remainder of funding shortfalls for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for fiscal year 2007, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Finance.

Sponsor: Senator Robert Menendez [NJ]

- **S.1024** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to improve the underlying science of drug safety decision-making and strengthen the ability of the Food and Drug Administration to assess, manage, and communicate drug safety information to patients and providers was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Judd Gregg [NH]

- **S.1036** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to prohibit human cloning was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Sam Brownback [KS]

- **S.1038** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to expand workplace health incentives by equalizing the tax consequences of employee athletic facility use was referred to the Committee on Finance.

Sponsor: Senator John Cornyn [TX]

- **S.1042** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to make the provision of technical services for

medical imaging examinations and radiation therapy treatments safer, more accurate, and less costly was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Michael B. Enzi [WY]

- **S.1050** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Public Health Service Act to set standards for medical diagnostic equipment and to establish a program for promoting good health, disease prevention, and wellness and for the prevention of secondary conditions for individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Tom Harkin [IA]

- **S.1052** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend title XIX and XXI of the Social Security Act to provide States with the option to provide nurse home visitation services under Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program was referred to the Committee on Finance.

Sponsor: Senator Ken Salazar [CO]

- **S.1056** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to provide for a comprehensive Federal effort relating to early detection of, treatments for, and the prevention of cancer, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Dianne Feinstein [CA]

- **S.1065** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to improve the diagnosis and treatment of traumatic brain injury in members and former members of the Armed Forces, to review and expand tele-health and tele-mental health programs of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Armed Services was referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

Sponsor: Senator Hilary Rodham Clinton [NY]

- **S.1067** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to require Federal agencies to support health impact assessments and take other actions to improve health and the environmental quality of communities and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Barack Obama [IL]

- **S.1068** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to promote healthy communities was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Barack Obama [IL]

- **S.1069** (introduced March 29, 2007): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act regarding early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of hearing loss was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Olympia J. Snowe [ME]

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Hill Hearings

- The Senate Veterans Affairs (VA) Committee on Health will hold an oversight hearing on **April 25, 2007**, to examine mental health issues at the VA.

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Meetings / Conferences

- The American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) will hold its 2007 Annual Meeting, "*A Century of Leadership in Science - A Future of Cancer Prevention and Cures*," on **April 14-18, 2007**, in Los Angeles, Calif. www.aacr.org.

- The 55th Annual Clinical Meeting of The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists will be held on **May 5-9, 2007** in San Diego, Calif. www.acog.org/acm/

- The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) will hold a two day meeting: “*Drug Abuse and Risky Behaviors: The Evolving Dynamics of HIV/AIDS*,” on **May 8-9, 2007**, in Bethesda, Md. <http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/apr2007/nida-04.htm>
- The 2007 Advance Technology Applications for Combat Casualty Care (ATACCC) Conference will be held on Aug. 13-15, 2007 in St Petersburg Beach, Fla. <http://www.usacc.org/ATACCC/index.htm>
- 46th Annual Research in Medical Education (RIME) Conference will be held **Nov. 2-7, 2007**, in conjunction with the AAMC Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.
- The 13th International Congress on Infectious Diseases will be held June 19-22, 2008, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. http://www.isid.org/13th_icid/

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