

# FEDERAL HEALTH UPDATE

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

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## **Congressional Schedule**

- On June 7, 2007, the House passed S.5, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act. This legislation would amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for human embryonic stem cell research.
- The House passed H.R. 1467, *the 10,000 Trained by 2010 Act*, is designed to better educate and train healthcare professionals in using information technology (IT) on June 6, 2007. The measure authorizes the National Science Foundation to award grants to colleges and universities to research and support the education and training of healthcare informatics personnel through newly-established degree programs or research centers.

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## **Military Health Care News**

- TriWest Healthcare Alliance launched an online Guard and Reserve Resource Center on June 1, 2007. The Resource Center, designed specifically for members of the National Guard and Reserve provides a virtual library of information for West Region TRICARE beneficiaries serving in the National

Guard and Reserve, their families and leadership.

The portal offers streaming video outlining TRICARE benefits for Guard and Reserve members; Guard and Reserve-specific news and updates, including TRICARE On Point, a quarterly e-newsletter; post-deployment support and behavioral health resources for the entire family; links to more than 80 support agencies and programs; and resources for military leadership.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance, the Defense Department's managed care contractor that administers TRICARE, the military's healthcare program throughout California and 20 other states in the West Region. <http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/06-05-2007/0004602401&EDATE=>

- The DoD Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care released its [interim report](#) on May 31, 2007. The preliminary report focuses on the pharmacy benefit and cost-sharing approaches and efficiencies within the entire MHS. The task force recommended improving business and management practices; altering incentives in the pharmacy benefit to encourage generic usage and mail-order program; changing cost-share and fee structures; and ensuring TRICARE is second payer. A final report will be released in December 2007.

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## Veterans Health Care News

- The [27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games](#) will be held on Milwaukee June 19 – 23 for more than 500 American veteran heroes with physical disabilities including more than 20 veterans injured in current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world.

The Wheelchair Games, presented each year by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), are open to all U.S. military veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, certain neurological conditions, amputations or other mobility impairments. For the first time at the Games, a demonstration track and field clinic will be held for athletes who are able to stand using prosthetic devices.

The Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee and the Wisconsin chapter of PVA are hosting the 2007 Games. Veterans competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games come from nearly all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Great Britain.

At the Games, veterans will compete in track and field, swimming, basketball, weightlifting, softball, air guns, quad rugby, 9-ball, bowling, table tennis, archery, handcycling, a motorized rally, wheelchair slalom, a power wheelchair relay and power soccer. Trapshooting and wheelchair curling are exhibition events this year. Events are being held at the Midwest Airlines Center, Veterans Park, Schroeder YMCA Aquatic Center, Bowlero Lanes, and other venues in and around Milwaukee.

Sports are important in the therapy used to treat many disabilities. VA is a recognized leader in

rehabilitation, with therapy programs available at VA health care facilities across the nation. For many injured veterans, the Wheelchair Games provide their first exposure to wheelchair athletics.

<http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1343>

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities announced the creation of a new multi-campus Nursing Academy. The new five-year, \$40 million pilot program will establish partnerships with 12 nursing schools across the country during the next three years, beginning with four for the 2007-2008 academic year. The VA nursing academy is a virtual organization with central administration in Washington and teaching at competitively selected nursing schools across the country who partner with VA.

VA has one of the largest nursing staffs of any health care system in the world, with about 61,000 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, vocational nurses and nursing assistants at the Department's 153 medical centers and nearly 900 clinics. VA currently provides clinical education to nearly 100,000 health professional trainees annually, including students from more than 600 schools of nursing.

Despite a nationwide shortage of nurses, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing has reported that more than 42,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in 2006 because of insufficient numbers of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space and clinical mentors. <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1342>

- Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Jim Nicholson officiated the ceremonies on June 3 dedicating the Great Lake National Cemetery in Holly, Mich. The Secretary was joined by William F. Tuerk, VA under secretary for memorial affairs and local officials.

Burials actually began at the 544-acre site in Oakland County on Oct. 17, 2005, and more than 2,500 interments have already taken place. Nearly 487,000 veterans and their families live within the service radius of the national cemetery, which is 45 miles northwest of Detroit.

Phase 1 construction of the cemetery, which is nearly complete, includes a public information center, an administration and maintenance complex, two committal shelters and an entrance area. The developed area has capacity for 6,500 full-casket gravesites, 1,450 in-ground cremation gravesites and 1,768 columbaria niches for cremation remains.

Veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a national cemetery. <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1340>

- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hosted an all-day "Welcome Home" event for recently returned veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and active duty service members preparing to separate from the military on June 2, at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (VAMC).

VA will offer a variety of screenings and counseling in the following areas: readjustment, employment, education, home loans, life insurance, transition and health care. In addition, the Marine Corps "Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) Muster" was conducted by the Marine Corps Mobilization Command (MOBCOM).

## Health Care News

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced a revision to the multimedia educational physicians' tool kit to help provide earlier diagnosis, management and appropriate referral for patients with concussions. One of the key components in the revised kit is the Acute Concussion Evaluation (ACE) assessment tool which can help physicians with their initial evaluation and diagnosis for patients of all ages with a known or suspected concussion.

Concussions or mild traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) are caused by a bump or blow to the head that disrupts the way the brain normally works. In the United States, at least 1.4 million people die or are treated in a hospital or emergency department with a TBI each year. Of those, 75 to 90 percent are categorized as mild TBIs. Many concussions are not treated and CDC experts estimate that 1.6 to 3.8 million sports and recreation-related TBIs occur each year in the U.S.

Working with CDC staff, researchers at Children's National Medical Center and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center developed the ACE assessment to guide physicians through an evaluation of characteristics of the injury, symptoms and risk factors.

The tool kit also contains practical, easy-to-use clinical information and tools, including the "Facts for Physicians" booklet; fact sheets in English and Spanish on preventing concussion; a palm card for on-field management of sports-related concussion; and a CD-ROM with downloadable kit materials and additional TBI resources. <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/2007/r070607.htm>

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a new advisory committee designed to counsel the agency on how to strengthen the communication of risks and benefits of FDA-regulated products to the public.

The Risk Communication Advisory Committee will help FDA better understand the communication needs and priorities of the general public; advise FDA on the development of strategic plans to communicate product risks and benefits; and make recommendations to FDA on what current research suggests about crafting risk and benefit messages, as well as how to most effectively communicate specific product information to vulnerable audiences.

Establishment of the new Risk Communication Advisory Committee stems from the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) 2006 report, *The Future of Drug Safety: Promoting and Protecting the Health of the Public*. The report recommended that Congress enact legislation establishing a new advisory committee to address how FDA communicates information about the efficacy, safety and use of drugs and other FDA-regulated medical products. FDA agreed with the value of such a committee and acted promptly to establish it through more speedy administrative procedures. FDA also expanded the scope of the committee to cover communication of risks and benefits of all products regulated by the agency.

The advisory committee will be made up of 15 voting members that include experts and public members who are not affiliated with the FDA. Experts will include authorities knowledgeable in the fields of risk communication, social marketing, health literacy, cultural competency, journalism, bioethics, and other relevant behavioral and social sciences. Public members will include those who can provide the perspective of users of FDA-regulated products, such as consumers, patients, caregivers and health professionals.

- On June 4, 2007, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the STS-7 Continuous Glucose Monitoring System (STS-7 System), a device that measures glucose levels continuously for up to seven days in people with diabetes.

While a standard fingerstick test records a person's glucose level as a snapshot in time, the (STS-7 System) measures glucose levels every five minutes throughout a seven-day period. This additional information can be used to detect trends and track patterns in glucose levels throughout the week that wouldn't be captured by fingerstick measurements alone. However, diabetics must still rely on the fingerstick test to decide whether additional insulin is needed.

The STS-7 System, manufactured by DexCom Inc. of San Diego, Calif., uses a disposable sensor placed just below the skin in the abdomen to measure the level of glucose in the fluid found in the body's tissues (interstitial fluid). Sensor placement causes minimal discomfort and can easily be done by patients themselves. The sensor must be replaced weekly. An alarm can be programmed to sound if a patient's glucose level reaches pre-set lows or pre-set highs.

Diabetes is caused by the body's inability to produce or use insulin, a hormone that unlocks the cells of the body, allowing glucose (sugar) to enter and fuel them. An estimated 20.8 million people in the United States—7 percent of the population—have diabetes. Most have type 2 diabetes, a condition in which the body does not properly use insulin. An estimated 5 percent to 10 percent of people with this chronic disease have type 1 diabetes, which results from the body's failure to produce insulin. People with type 1 diabetes must take insulin every day.

Diabetes can lead to wide fluctuations in blood sugar levels. Over time, abnormally high levels of glucose can damage the small and large blood vessels, leading to diabetic blindness, kidney disease, amputations of limbs, stroke, and heart disease.

While there is no known cure, studies have shown that patients who regularly monitor and regulate their blood glucose levels have lower incidences of complications associated with the disease.

A three-day version of the device, the STS Continuous Glucose Monitoring System, was approved in March 2006. <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01647.html>

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## Reserve/Guard

- The total number of Guard and Reserve currently on active duty has **increased** by 91 from the last report to 86,439. The totals for each service are Army National Guard and Army Reserve, 67,652; Navy Reserve,

5,335; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,169; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,924; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 359. [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil)

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## Reports/Policies

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM) released “*A 21st Century System for Evaluating Veterans for Disability Benefits*,” on June 7, 2007. The report examined the medical evaluation and rating of veterans for the benefits provided by Veterans Affairs. The IOM recommended the VA improve their system comprehensively updating the entire Rating Schedule and establish a regular process for keeping it up to date; dedicating staff to maintaining the Rating Schedule and reestablish an external advisory committee of medical and other disability experts to assist in the updating process; and examining the current statutory purpose of VA’s disability compensation program (to compensate for average loss of earning capacity) and expand it to include compensation for non-work disability and loss of quality of life.

<http://www.iom.edu/CMS/26761/34247/43423.aspx>

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM) released “*Training Physicians for Public Health Careers*,” on June 6, 2007. The report studied what knowledge and skills are needed by public health physicians; the number of programs needed to maintain an adequate supply of physicians trained for public health careers; and how these programs can be funded.

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## Legislation

- **H.RES.464** (introduced June 6, 2007): Providing for consideration of the bill (S. 5) to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for human embryonic stem cell research was placed on the House calendar. Sponsor: Representative Doris O. Matsui [CA-5]

- **H.R.2580** (introduced June 6, 2007): To improve patient access to health care services and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the health care delivery system was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, and in addition to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, 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 Phil Gingrey [GA-110]

- **H.R.2581** (introduced June 6, 2007): To amend titles XIX and XXI of the Social Security Act to permit States to expand coverage for children between 19 and 25 years of age under Medicaid and under the State child health insurance program (SCHIP) was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Sponsor: Representative Tammy Baldwin [WI-2].

- **H.R.2584** (introduced June 6, 2007): To amend the Public Health Service Act to alleviate critical

shortages of physicians in the fields of family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, general surgery, and obstetrics-gynecology, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: Representative Michael C. Burgess [TX-26]

- **H.R.2589** (introduced June 6, 2007): To amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and the Public Health Service Act to reauthorize and amend the Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act and the Pediatric Research Equity Act was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Sponsor: Representative Anna G. Eshoo [CA-14]

- **S.RES.221** (introduced June 6, 2007): A resolution supporting National Peripheral Arterial Disease Awareness Month and efforts to educate people about peripheral arterial disease was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Mike Crapo [ID]

- **S.1555** (introduced June 6, 2007): A bill to establish certain duties for pharmacies to ensure provision of Food and Drug Administration-approved contraception and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Frank R. Lautenberg [NJ]

- **S.1556** (introduced June 6, 2007): A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the exclusion from gross income for employer-provided health coverage to designated plan beneficiaries of employees and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Finance.

Sponsor: Senator Gordon H. Smith [OR]

- **S.1560** (introduced June 6, 2007): A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to improve the quality and availability of mental health services for children and adolescents was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Sponsor: Senator Christopher J. Dodd [CT]

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## Hill Hearings

- The House Armed Services Subcommittee for Military Personnel will hold a hearing on **June 13, 2007**, to receive testimony on Walter Reed progress review and results of the Independent Review Group.

- The Veterans Affairs committees for the Senate and House will hold a joint hearing on **Sept. 20, 2007**, to hear the American Legion's legislative presentation.

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## Meetings / Conferences

- The Global Medical Readiness Conference will be held **June 25 – 28, 2007**, in Orlando, Fl. <https://secure.giuffrida.org/airforce/index.html>
- The Society of Ghana Women's Medical and Dental Practitioners, the 27th International MWIA Congress is scheduled for **July 31 to Aug. 4, 2007** in Accra, Ghana. [www.mwiainghana.org](http://www.mwiainghana.org)
- The Force Health Protection Conference will be held **Aug. 4 – 10, 2007**, in Louisville, Ky. <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/fhp/>
- 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.usaccc.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/](http://www.isid.org/13th_icid/)

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*If you need further information on any of the items in the Federal Health Update, please contact Kate Connelly Theroux at (703) 447-3257 or by e-mail at [kate@usminstitute.org](mailto:kate@usminstitute.org). To subscribe, please visit <http://usminstitute.org/subscriber.cfm>. To unsubscribe, please send an email to [update@usminstitute.org](mailto:update@usminstitute.org) with UNSUBSCRIBE as the subject.*