

FEDERAL HEALTH UPDATE

Oct 8, 2010

Produced by Kate Connelly Theroux in collaboration with the Institute of Federal Health Care (IFHC)

To subscribe, please visit <http://fedhealthinst.org/subscribe.cfm>.

Sponsored by



Additional sponsorship by

www.fedhealthinst.org

Executive and Congressional News

- The House will stand adjourned until Nov. 15, 2010.
- The Senate will stand in recess until Nov. 12, 2010.

- **President Barack Obama proclaimed Monday, Oct. 4, 2010, as Child Health Day.**

For more details, please visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/04/presidential-proclamation-child-health-day>.

Military Health Care News

- **The 2008 Department of Defense (DoD) survey, "Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel," reported that 30.5 percent of active duty personnel smoke.**

A June 2009 Institute of Medicine report, commissioned by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the DoD, found that 22 percent of all veterans smoke.

For beneficiaries looking to quit, TRICARE offers multiple programs and services to help. Treatment, including smoking cessation programs, is available at many military treatment facilities. Beneficiaries can find a local military treatment facility at www.tricare.mil/mtf.All non-Medicare eligible TRICARE beneficiaries within the United States can get assistance with smoking cessation by calling TRICARE's *Smoking Quitline*, toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including weekends and holidays. Beneficiaries in the TRICARE South Region can reach the quitline at 877-414-9949. Beneficiaries living in the North Region can call 866-459-8766 and those living in the West Region can call 866-244-6870. Beneficiaries using Medicare can get assistance through Medicare.Any TRICARE beneficiary, who wants to quit using tobacco, can access the official DoD sponsored Web site at www.uncanquit2.org.

- **Health Net Federal Services, LLC, announced it was re-awarded three Patient Appointing Services bridge contracts.**

The new awards continue the Patient Appointing Services work in Fort Irwin and Puget Sound through March 31, 2011, and in Great Lakes through Jan. 31, 2011, by the United States Army's Center for Health Care Contracting, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Each contract includes an option to extend services for an additional six months.

Health Net is responsible for verifying and updating registration information in the appointment system, making and canceling patient appointments with Military Treatment Facility providers, and providing performance and management reports on the appointing process for eligible beneficiaries.

Health Net currently provides Patient Appointing Services for the seven Military Treatment Facilities in Puget Sound, Wash., the James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in Great Lakes, Ill., and Weed Army Community Hospital in Fort Irwin, Calif.

- **According to the San Diego Union-Tribune, Senate Republicans blocked a vote on a \$726 billion military spending bill that included a provision to extend TRICARE health care coverage to adult children under age 26.**

The health plan for active duty and retired services members already included the benefits of the health care overhaul that became law last spring. But there is one major exception: a provision allowing parents to keep adult children on their policy until age 26.

Republicans blocked the vote because the spending bill included a provision ending the ban on gays serving openly in the military. The Senate isn't expected to revisit the bill until after the Nov. 2 election. The House passed the spending bill, including the TRICARE change, in May.

Currently, TRICARE covers dependents until age 21, or 23 for full-time students.

The new law requiring health insurance companies to allow parents to keep adult children on their policy until age 26 applies to policies purchased or renewed after Sept. 23. It's one of the most popular elements of the law that became effective last week.

TRICARE has specifically been exempted from health care reform laws.

Veterans Health Care News

- **Two community colleges and three other four-year colleges and universities have been added to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) VetSuccess on Campus pilot program.**

VA counselors are being assigned to assist veterans attending school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill make the most of their educational opportunities at Salt Lake City Community College, the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, Arizona State University and Texas A&M University -- Central Texas.

The pilot program is designed to ensure veterans' health, educational and benefits needs are met as they make the transition from active-duty military service to college life.

Under the pilot program already underway at the University of South Florida, Cleveland State University and San Diego State University, experienced VA vocational rehabilitation counselors and outreach coordinators from VA's Vet Centers are assigned to campuses to provide vocational testing, career and academic counseling and readjustment counseling services to ensure veterans receive the support and assistance needed to successfully pursue their educational and employment goals.

VA counselors work directly with school officials to establish effective communications channels with veteran students and coordinate the delivery of VA benefits and services.

Peer-to-peer counseling and referral services are also available to help resolve any problems that could potentially interfere with a veteran's educational program, including referrals for more intensive health services through VA Medical Centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, or Vet Centers, as needed.

For more information on VA benefit programs and VetSuccess, go to <http://www.vba.va.gov> or www.vetsuccess.gov or call 1-800-827-1000.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a \$224 million contract to Cullinan Properties, Ltd., for the construction of a new state-of-the-art medical clinic in Austin.**

Thomas C. Smith III, director of the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System, who oversees the Austin Outpatient Clinic, said the new 185,000-square-foot clinic will be three times as large as the existing clinic with almost twice the clinic staff. The VA clinic will be the largest of its type in the country.

The existing clinic opened in 1990 and was expanded in 1997. In 2008, VA leased 15,000 additional square feet in the Southgate Building to serve the growing number of patients.

Expanded services at the new clinic will include specialty, chemotherapy, cardiac rehabilitation, eye, ear, nose and throat (ENT) services, orthopedic services, prosthetics, and more.

expanded services at the new clinic will include oncology, chemotherapy, cardiac rehabilitation, ear, nose and throat (ENT) services, orthopedic services, minor surgeries, urology and gastroenterology. It will include space for an endoscopy suite, a computerized tomography (CT) scanner and a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine, as well as more space for all the services provided at the current Austin VA location.

The clinic will employ about 315 people, up from the current staff of 182. The Central Texas VA Health Care System serves more than 80,000 veterans.

- **Fox News reports that two veterans groups lost in their effort to have the Supreme Court force bureaucrats in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to move more swiftly in processing claims.**

On Oct. 4, the Supreme Court announced they will not hear a case challenging a supposed lack of brevity from the government.

The Vietnam Veterans of America and the Veterans of Modern Warfare allege that the VA takes far too long to process claims made by its members and for all veterans. They contend that officials can take more than a year to respond to an initial claim and upwards of five years for the appeals process to wind its way through a "Byzantine system of procedural hurdles."

While the groups complain about the number of veterans who are denied claims or offered less assistance than what they're seeking, their suit only challenged the duration of the claims process. "Veterans waiting for the VA to issue a decision have lost their homes to foreclosure, been forced to declare bankruptcy, suffered through divorce, and had to endure declining mental and physical health due at least in part to the VA's delays," lawyers for the groups wrote to the high court.

The groups wanted a ruling that would lead to a mandate forcing the VA to respond within 90 days time for all initial claims and 180 days to resolve appeals.

Lower courts ruled against the veterans taking issue with their use of average wait times as proof of harm. "One cannot have standing in federal court by asserting an injury to someone else," wrote Judge Laurence Silberman in a unanimous opinion of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Monday's decision effectively upholds that ruling.

- **The Veterans Affairs Department's pharmacy re-engineering project – tagged as a troubled project last year – was put back on track, according to Government Health IT.**

The system, designed to modernize the way VA pharmacists perform medication ordering and dosage control, is now in production at a VA hospital in South Carolina and will expand to four more hospitals soon.

The project has been divided into a series of smaller, incremental jobs and is expected to reduce drug dosing errors. Records from Program Management Accountability System (PMAS) show that VA has met more than 80 percent of the milestones for its major IT projects in fiscal 2010. PMAS measures progress on 97 VA IT development projects.

All IT projects must now deliver at least every six months advances in functionality that customers can use, or the project does not proceed. Last year, VA canceled 12 and restructured 33 IT projects, including the pharmacy project, using the PMAS system.

Health Care News

- **The 2010 Nobel Prize in chemistry has been awarded to National Institutes of Health (NIH) grantee Ei-ichi Negishi, Ph.D., of Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.**

Dr. Negishi shares the award with Richard F. Heck, Ph.D., of the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware and Akira Suzuki, Ph.D., of Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan. The three researchers are honored for developing complementary methods to find more efficient ways of linking carbon atoms together to build complex molecules.

Dr. Negishi has received more than \$6.5 million in support from the NIH's National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) since 1979.

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) awarded more than \$13 million to six states to design comprehensive applicant criminal background check programs for jobs involving direct patient care.**

Created by the Affordable Care Act, the new National Background Check Program will help identify "best practices" for long-term care providers to determine whether a job seeker has any kind of criminal history or other disqualifying information that could make him or her unsuitable to work directly with residents.

The first round of states to participate in the program include: Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Missouri, and Rhode Island. They each will share a portion of \$13.7 million. An additional 11 states applied and may be funded beginning in October or November. CMS will also issue a second solicitation in October for those states that did not apply but may still do so.

The new law set aside \$160 million for the program, which is to run through September 2012, an amount sufficient to enable all states to participate. The national background check for each prospective direct patient care employee must include a criminal history search of both state and federal abuse and neglect registries and databases, such as the Nurse Aide Registry or FBI files.

Long-term care facilities or providers covered under the new program include nursing facilities, home health agencies, hospice providers, long-term care hospitals, and intermediate care facilities for persons with mental retardation, and other entities that provide long-term care services.

- **The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced the award of a \$904,000 cooperative agreement to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to research and develop an information hub for medical products and related regulatory processes and systems in the Americas Region.**

The award will help FDA, and all PAHO member states, better understand other countries' regulatory systems; support capacity to use harmonized standards and guidelines across countries; and prevent, and if necessary respond more quickly to, problems in the medical product supply chain. The "hub" will collect and produce data and map structures and processes in the areas of medical products, including drugs, biologics, vaccines, medical devices and other medical products, and related regulatory processes and systems.

Established in 1902, PAHO works to improve the health and the quality of life of people of the Americas and serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization. PAHO member states today include 38 countries in North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

Regulatory agencies in the Americas Region have different legal and regulatory frameworks, different institutional and administrative structures, different standards and guidelines, and different ways of collecting and analyzing information.

Better collaboration among these agencies will build confidence and knowledge among the participants, stakeholders and ultimately benefit patients and consumers throughout the region.

The cooperative agreement will be administered by the FDA's Office of International Programs, in concert with the agency's relevant product centers. OIP is the focal point of coordination for FDA's global engagement.

- **The U.S. Food and Drug Administration awarded \$2.9 million to support six research projects that will help with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis (TB).**

TB remains a major public health challenge with an increasing prevalence worldwide. Two recent articles published by FDA's Office of Critical Path Programs note that advances are urgently needed in TB drug development to shorten therapy and to treat drug-resistant disease.

Funded with congressional support in FY2010, the following six grantees were chosen from among 30 applications:

- Michael Brennan, Ph.D., Aeras Global TB Vaccine Foundation – Discovery of biological and immunological biomarkers for TB vaccines
- Ann Ginsberg, M.D., Ph.D., Global Alliance for TB Drug Development – Frozen trials, developing a repository of clinical trial specimens
- Khisimuzi Mdluli, Ph.D., Global Alliance of TB Drug Development – Qualifying new preclinical models for the development of tuberculosis drug combinations
- Fred Quinn, Ph.D., the University of Georgia Research Foundation Inc. – Development of a diagnostic for latent TB
- John T. Belisle, Ph.D., Colorado State University – Small molecule biomarkers for tuberculosis treatment, relapse, and cure
- Marc D. Porter, Ph.D., the University of Utah – Development and validation of point-of-care tests for tuberculosis (ultrasensitive SERS detection technology for low concentration antigens).

Launched in 2004, the Critical Path Initiative is the FDA's strategy for driving innovation in the way medical products are developed, evaluated, and manufactured.

- **The National Institutes of Health (NIH) intends to invest approximately \$60 million over the next five years in the NIH Director's Early Independence Award (EIA) program to help junior investigators leapfrog over traditional post-doctoral training and move into independent academic positions at U.S. institutions, directly upon completion of their graduate research degrees.**

Recent trends have demonstrated an increase in the length of the traditional scientific training often translates into an increase in the amount of time it takes for scientists to embark on independent research careers. These hurdles can result in valuable time lost by scientists in pursuit of independent biomedical research and deter students as they consider possible careers in biomedical research.

and other students as they consider possible careers in biomedical research.

Although traditional post-doctoral training is appropriate for the majority of new Ph.D. and M.D. recipients, there is a pool of talented junior scientists who have the intellect, scientific creativity, drive and maturity to flourish independently without the need for traditional post-doctoral training. Consequently, the NIH has created the EIA Program to provide support for outstanding investigators within a year of completion of their degree to launch their own independent research programs.

The NIH expects to issue up to 10 awards in fall 2011. EIA recipients will receive up to \$250,000 in direct costs per year for up to five years for research that complements and enhances an institution's research program.

The deadline for submitting EIA applications is Jan. 21, 2011. Additional information, including the funding opportunity announcement is available at: <http://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence>.

- **The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) announced three new contracts to fund research on vaccines to protect against emerging infectious diseases and biological threats that could be used in a terror attack.**

Each project focuses on simple and efficient vaccine delivery approaches that could be deployed quickly. The total funding for the three contracts could reach \$68 million, depending on the successful completion of defined project milestones.

The three studies will focus on a dengue vaccine delivered by a needle-free device, an anthrax vaccine delivered orally and an anthrax vaccine delivered in conjunction with an adjuvant-a compound that stimulates the immune system.

- The dengue vaccine is being developed by Inviragen Inc. of Fort Collins, Colo. The vaccine is tetravalent, or designed to protect against any of the four related viruses that cause dengue fever. A needle-free system, developed by Pharmajet of Golden, Colo., will be used to deliver the liquid vaccine through the skin at a high speed. Researchers anticipate that protection will be possible with one to two doses. The NIAID \$1.8 million award will support clinical testing of the vaccine product. Additional funding of up to a total of \$15.5 million will be awarded over the next five years if clinical milestones are met.
- PaxVax Inc. of San Diego will develop and test two formulations of an anthrax vaccine. Both formulations contain a gene known as rPA, which codes for a protein that protected animals from anthrax in previous studies. Pending review and approval of the Investigational New Drug Application by the Food and Drug Administration, a Phase 1 clinical trial will be conducted to select one of the two formulations for further development. NIAID has made an initial award of \$3.8 million to PaxVax. If milestones are met, the total award could amount to \$23.8 million over the next nine years.
- Emergent Biosolutions of Rockville, Md., also will develop and test an anthrax vaccine. The candidate vaccine consists of Emergent's licensed anthrax vaccine (BioThrax) combined with an adjuvant. The investigational vaccine was tested in a Phase 1 clinical trial prior to the award of this contract. This new \$9.1 million award will fund manufacturing, stability studies, assay validation and clinical trial preparation of the vaccine product. After those activities are completed, Emergent may receive additional funding of up to \$28.7 million over the next four years if clinical milestones are met.

- **Nearly 50 million Americans have doctor-diagnosed arthritis, and 21 million people say the disease limits their physical activities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).**

In its *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* for Oct. 8, the CDC says arthritis is increasing, that it's especially common among people who are obese, and that unless Americans learn to control their weight, the prevalence of the disease is sure to keep rising.

Arthritis represents a major public health problem in the United States "that can be addressed, at least in part, by implementing proven obesity prevention strategies and increasing availability of effective physical activity programs and self-management education courses in local communities," study authors write.

Reserve/Guard

- As of Oct. 5, 2010, the total number of Guard and Reserve currently on active duty has **decreased** by 3,137 to 100,763. The totals for each service are Army National Guard and Army Reserve 74,773; Navy Reserve, 6,768; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,446; Marine Corps Reserve, 4,085, and the Coast Guard Reserve, 691. www.defenselink.mil

Reports/Policies

- **The GAO published "Information Technology: Opportunities Exist to Improve Management of DoD's Electronic Health Record Initiative," (GAO-11-50) on Oct. 6, 2010.** In this report, the GAO determined the status of AHLTA; determine; DOD's plans for acquiring its new system; and evaluated DoD's acquisition management of the initiative. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1150.pdf>
- **The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health," on Oct. 5, 2010.** This report provides recommendations for an action-oriented blueprint for the future of nursing. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/The-Future-of-Nursing-Leading-Change-Advancing-Health.aspx>
- **The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published "Rare Diseases and Orphan Products: Accelerating Research and Development," on Oct. 4, 2010.** This report examines the opportunities for and obstacles in developing drugs and medical devices for treating rare diseases. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/Rare-Diseases-and-Orphan-Products-Accelerating-Research-and-Development.aspx>

Legislation

- There was no legislation proposed this week.

Hill Hearings

- There are no hearings scheduled.

Meetings / Conferences

- The 6th Modern Drug Discovery & Development Summit will be held on **Oct. 20-22, 2010**, in San Francisco, Calif. <http://www.gtcbio.com/conferenceDetails.aspx?id=158>
- The 39th World Congress on Military Medicine will be held **Oct. 23-28, 2011**, in Abuja, Nigeria. <http://39wcmmbj2011.com/>
- IDGA's Electronic Health Records Summit will be held on **Oct. 27 - 29, 2010**, in Vienna, Va. <http://www.electronichealthrecordssummit.com/Event.aspx?id=338518>
- The annual Shots for Tots conference will be held on **Oct. 28-29, 2010**, in New Orleans. <http://www.shotsfortots.com/html/conference.html>
- The 116th Annual Meeting of AMSUS – "Federal Medicine: A Global Source for Health" will be held **Oct. 31 to Nov. 5, 2010**, in Phoenix, Ariz. www.amsus.org
- The 138th American Public Health Association Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held on **Nov. 6-10, 2010**, in Denver Colo. <http://www.apha.org/meetings/>
- The 5th Annual World Healthcare Innovation and Technology will be held on **Nov. 7 - 10, 2010**, in Alexandria Va. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HL10010/index.cfm?confCode=HL10010>
- The 6th Annual World Healthcare Innovation and Technology Congress (WHIT v.6.0) will be held **Nov. 8-10, 2010**, in Washington D.C. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HL10010/>
- The AHIP Fall Forum 2009 will be held on **Nov. 8-10, 2010**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.ahip.org/links/fallforum2010/>
- AMIA 2009 Annual Symposium will be held on **Nov. 13-17, 2010**, in Washington D.C. <http://symposium2010.amia.org/>
- The 21st Annual National Forum on Quality Improvement in Health Care will be held on **Dec. 5-8, 2010**, in Orlando, Fla. <http://www.ihl.org/IHL/Programs/ConferencesAndSeminars/22ndAnnualNationalForumonQualityImprovementinHealthCare.htm>
- Military Medicine's Next Gen in Training, Treatment, and Technology will be held on **Dec. 6 - 8, 2010**, in San Antonio, Texas. www.BattlefieldHealthCare.com
- The World Influenza Congress will be held **Dec. 7-9, 2010**, in Amsterdam. <http://www.terrapinn.com/2010/flu/conf.stm>
- The 2011 Military Health System (MHS) Conference will be held on **Jan. 24 – 27, 2011** in Washington D.C. www.health.mil
- The International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance will be held on **Feb. 4-7, 2011**, in Vienna Austria. <http://imed.isid.org/>
- The Armed Forces Public Health Conference will be held on **March 21-25, 2011**, in Hampton Va. <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/thpc/>
- The World Health Care Congress 8th Annual Health IT/ Interoperability Summit will be held on **April 4-6, 2011**, in Washington D.C. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR11000/>

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 katetheroux@fedhealthinst.org. To subscribe, please visit <http://fedhealthinst.org/subscriber.cfm>. To unsubscribe, please send an email to newsletter@fedhealthinst.org with UNSUBSCRIBE as the subject.

Back Issues available at [Federal Health Update Archives](http://www.fedhealthinst.org/Archives).

© Copyright 2007, IFHC
5185 MacArthur Blvd. NW, Suite 103-656, Washington, DC 20016
(202)271-5814 postmaster@fedhealthinst.org