

FEDERAL HEALTH UPDATE

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

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Federal Health Update will not be published on Aug. 12 and 26, 2011

Executive and Congressional News

- **Congress accomplished nothing this week.**

Military Health Care News

- **Walter Reed Army Medical Center, located in Washington, D.C., held its closing ceremony on July 26.**

Although the historic redbrick, pillared building six miles from the White House will stay, Walter Reed's operations will move to a new location in Bethesda, Md., that will consolidate three military hospitals.

The move, which has been planned since 2005 to cut costs, will take place throughout August.

Since it was built in 1909, the small hospital with an 80-bed capacity had grown to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of troops who served in World War II, Vietnam, Korea and, most recently, Iraq and Afghanistan. The now 5,500-room facility currently treats about 775,000 outpatients each year, including veterans and their families.

- **TriWest Healthcare Alliance announced it has been awarded U.S. Army's patient appointing function at Munson Army Health Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.**

The four-year contract begins Nov. 1, 2011, and is anticipated to support approximately 20,000 beneficiaries in securing appointments for a range of preventive, general and specialty healthcare services.

The contract was awarded under the Army Patient Appointing MATO (Multiple Award Task Order) Contract.

- **TriWest Healthcare Alliance announced that two of their programs are finalists for the 2011 URAC Awards for Best Practices in Health Care Consumer Empowerment and Protection.**

TriWest, which administers the military's TRICARE healthcare plan for 2.9 million military families across 21 western states, joins other industry-leading programs as Best Practices finalists. URAC, one of the nation's leading accreditation organizations, will honor the finalists Oct. 4–6 at the 12th Annual Quality Summit in Chicago.

The Quality Summit Awards honor programs in two areas: consumer decisionmaking and consumer health improvement. TriWest's program finalists are:

- TRICARE Assistance Program—Connects military members and dependents with 24/7 access to online behavioral healthcare access, including Web-based video-conferencing.
- Tobacco Cessation—Helps beneficiaries cope with tobacco addiction through classes offered over the phone.

URAC, an independent, nonprofit organization, is a leader in promoting healthcare quality through its accreditation and certification programs. For more information, visit www.urac.org.

- **At the 2011 Armed Forces Operational Medicine Symposium in Colorado Springs, the Military Vaccine (MILVAX) Agency led an Immunization Leaders Course (ILC) which offered an opportunity for the agency to share updates from the services and Department of Defense agencies.**

The course, which was conducted for the first time at the conference, was similar to one that MILVAX conducts at various locations in the United States and abroad. Topics included briefings on the seasonal influenza vaccination program, vaccine storage and handling, the eight standards of military immunization delivery and information on new vaccines and vaccines in development for future use. Some 500 service members attended.

In addition to hands-on outreach efforts at the conference, MILVAX addressed issues of increased vaccine advocacy and highlighted DoD efforts in past influenza seasons, which resulted in faster and higher levels of compliance each year. MILVAX also encouraged active participation from medical personnel through updates on the MILVAX website and other resources.

It is through hands-on outreach efforts like the conference that MILVAX is able to connect directly with the front-line personnel it aims to serve in order to maintain the DoD's high standard of excellence in immunizations.

Veterans Health Care News

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded \$56.7 million in contracts to build solar photovoltaic (PV) systems in support of ongoing energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives.**

By summer 2012, VA will install the solar PV systems at five VA medical centers in sunny locations, from Texas to California. VA selected the sites based on feasibility studies that determined the most ideal locations to invest in on-site renewable energy projects.

Solar PV installations are slated for Oklahoma City; Temple, Texas; Amarillo, Texas; Loma Linda, Calif. and West Los Angeles.

VA's goal is to increase renewable energy consumption to 15 percent of annual electricity usage by 2013. The installation of these five solar PV systems will help VA meet that goal. Renewable energy projects such as, solar PV and wind turbines, provide free energy to power VA facilities and provide a variety of benefits.

VA has also awarded 35 additional solar PV systems at medical centers and national cemeteries across the nation. VA has invested over \$300 million in renewable energy projects since 2009.

Information on these on-going projects and more can be found at green.va.gov.

- **According to media reports, the Roseburg Veterans Hospital will remain open and operational, retaining the current level of medical and surgical services.**

VA Officials said after careful consideration and input from veterans, employees and congressional and community stakeholders, they have decided that the VA Roseburg Health Care System will remain open and operational, retaining the current level of medical and surgical services.

Local veterans groups who worked hard to make sure their concerns were heard had mixed reactions to the announcement because some had hoped the ICU would be re-established

Meanwhile, over \$55-million in approved capital investment projects are in the works through fiscal year 2013.

- **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is testing and will soon allow healthcare workers at VA facilities access to a commercial cloud product for document storage and information sharing services.**

Employees will pass through a VA portal which provides VA authentication, confirms them as a VA user and routes them to the cloud site's VA-dedicated area, said VA Chief Information Officer Roger Baker. The only way into the space will be through a direct link from VA, said Baker.

The move addresses a past, recurring infraction in VA's monthly data breach reports to Congress: unauthorized access to commercial cloud solutions at VA health facilities. Among the tools reportedly used by VA health practitioners in past IT reports were GoogleDocs and Yahoo Calendar. However, Baker would only say the first tool VA will use is from a "recognizable" vendor.

In an April [press briefing](#), Baker said he wanted to allow VA employees access to a cloud-based, end-user information sharing solution by the end of summer 2011. At the time Baker said VA was in discussions with vendors now on how set up a secure solution according to VA standards. The department didn't want to develop its own version of cloud information sharing software, he said, adding "I can guarantee you it would not be as good and it would not be as popular."

Health Care News

- **A new World Health Organization (WHO) study suggests that depression is more common in affluent nations.**

The study, published on July 25 in the journal of BMC medicine, was a result of a nine category survey taken by the organization that interviewed nationally representative samples of people in 18 countries across the globe. Overall, the survey reached nearly 90,000 people.

To be able to compare the data by socioeconomic indicators, the survey divided countries into categories of high-income and low-to-middle-income, based upon World Bank classifications.

The study concluded that 15 percent of people in high income countries were likely to face an episode of depression in their lifetime, whereas 11 percent of people in low income countries would also face the same reality once in their lifetime.

Findings of the survey conclude that France (21 percent) and the United States (19.2 percent) had the highest instances of people that faced clinical depression once in their lifetime, while lower-income countries such as China (6.5 percent) and Mexico (8 percent) had the lowest incidences of depression.

In fact, four of the five countries that topped the list where high income countries: France, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United States. Brazil was the only country in the low-to-middle-income category that made the top five.

The study also finds an important gender disparity with regards to depression, as women have a twofold increased risk of having major depressive episodes.

The study concludes that depression is a severe global problem that is only getting worse. It ranks depression as the fourth leading cause of disability worldwide and projects that by 2020 it will be the second leading cause of disability.

- **U.S. District Chief Judge Royce Lamberth dismissed a lawsuit that tried to block funding of stem-cell research on human embryos on July 27.**

In April, a federal appeals court in April lifted a previous injunction on continued funding.

The field of embryonic stem-cell research has been highly controversial, because in most cases the research process involves destroying the embryo, typically four or five days old, after removing stem cells. These cells are blank and can become any cell in the body. Because of the destruction of embryos, most opponents contend this is moral issue. Supporters of the research point to the potential for saving lives.

Legislation passed in 1996 prohibits the use of taxpayer dollars in the creation or destruction of human embryos "for research purposes." Private money had been used to gather batches of the developing cells at U.S.-run labs.

The current administration had broken with the Bush White House and issued rules in 2009 permitting those cells to be reproduced in controlled conditions and for work on them to move forward.

In opposing the lawsuit, the government had argued that an extensive list of research projects outlined by the government health research agency would have to be shelved if the courts blocked further funding.

Embryonic stem-cell research differs from other kinds of stem-cell research, which don't require embryos. The ruling does not deal with separate research on adult stem cells, which remains permissible under federal law.

Under the Obama administration's rules, at least 75 stem-cell lines qualify for federal funding, according to the National Institutes of Health.

NIH has invested more than \$500 million in human embryonic stem-cell research.

- **The CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) issued the *First Periodic Review of Scientific and Medical Evidence Related to Cancer for the World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program*.**

This first periodic review provides a summary of the current scientific and medical findings in the peer-reviewed literature about exposures resulting from the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City and cancer studies.

Since research into cancer and WTC exposures is ongoing, it is expected that a second periodic review will be conducted in early to mid-2012.

The issuance of this periodic review fulfills the provision under the *James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010* that the World Trade Center Program Administrator conduct this first review of the scientific and medical evidence. This first review discusses criteria that have been used previously to assist in weighing the scientific evidence to determine if a causal association exists between exposure and cancer. The review also summarizes input from the public and provides updates from researchers about ongoing or planned cancer studies.

For more information on the WTC Health Program visit the website at www.cdc.gov/niosh/wtc

- **The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that the federal government is contemplating various ways of enhancing the regulations overseeing research on human subjects.**

Before making changes to the regulations, the government is seeking the public's input on an array of issues related to the ethics, safety and oversight of human research. The changes under consideration can be found in an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM), *Human Subjects Research Protections: Enhancing Protections for Research Subjects and Reducing Burden, Delay, and Ambiguity for Investigators*, published in the July 25 [Federal Register](#). The proposed changes are designed to strengthen protections for human research subjects.

The current regulations governing human subject research were developed years ago when research was predominantly conducted at universities, colleges and medical institutions. Also, most studies generally took place at only a single site. Expansion of human subject research into many new scientific disciplines and venues and an increase in multi-site studies have highlighted ambiguities in the current rules and have led to questions about whether the current regulatory framework is effectively keeping up with the needs of researchers and research subjects.

Revisions to the current regulations are now being considered because HHS believes these changes will strengthen protections for research subjects.

For additional information about the changes under consideration, visit <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/anprm2011page.html>.

- **Health-care spending will make up 20 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product by the end of the decade, according to the Office of the Actuary at the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.**

National health expenditures rose 4 percent to \$2.6 trillion in 2010 from a year earlier. Growth will be fueled by demand from 30 million Americans who will receive new subsidies under the health overhaul.

Health expenses this decade will rise at an average annual rate of 5.8 percent, or 1.1 percent more than anticipated U.S. economic growth. Higher spending on health insurance, prescription drugs and physician services will outstrip rising hospital costs as younger, healthier Americans enroll in government-financed health programs, the actuaries report.

Spending on health-care products and services will increase an average of 6.2 percent in the last five years of the decade when the coverage expansions from the health law are in effect, or within one percentage point of expenditures would have been absent the law.

During 2014, the first year the health overhaul begins providing subsidies for private insurance and expanding eligibility for Medicaid, national spending will rise 8.3 percent, according to the findings.

Reserve/Guard

- As of July 26, 2011, the total number of Guard and Reserve currently on active duty has declined by 694 to reach 92,602. The totals for each service are Army National Guard and Army 71,378; Navy Reserve, 4,618; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9,808; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,052, and the Coast Guard Reserve, 746. www.defenselink.mil

Reports/Policies

- **The GAO published "Department of Veterans Affairs: Issues Related to Real Property Realignment and Future Health Care Costs," (GAO-11-877T) on July 27, 2011.** This report examines the lifetime costs of supporting the newest generation of veterans' health care needs. It addresses VA's real property realignment efforts and VA's approach to developing budget estimates for health care. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-877T>
- **The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published "Leveraging Food Technology for Obesity Prevention and Reduction Effort - Workshop Summary," on July 27, 2011.** This report examines the complexity of human eating behavior and explores ways in which the food industry can continue to leverage modern and innovative food processing technologies to influence energy intake as one method to reduce and prevent obesity. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Leveraging-Food-Technology-for-Obesity-Prevention-and-Reduction-Effort.aspx>
- **The GAO published "Value in Health Care: Key Information for Policymakers to Assess Efforts to Improve Quality While Reducing Costs," (GAO-11-445) on July 25, 2011.** This report examines the availability of evidence on the effect of selected interventions on quality of care and costs; identifies key dimensions for assessing the strength of such evidence; and examines factors that can facilitate the implementation and replication of health care interventions. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-445>
- **The GAO published "Medicare Part D: Changes in Utilization Similar for Randomly Reassigned and Other Low-Income Subsidy Beneficiaries," (GAO-11-546R) on July 22, 2011.** In this report, we describe how drug coverage and access to pharmacies compared between benchmark and non-benchmark PDPs from 2007 through 2010; and how changes in drug and pharmacy utilization compared between randomly reassigned and other LIS beneficiaries who were not randomly reassigned from 2007 to 2008. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-546R>
- **The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published "A Nationwide Framework for Surveillance of Cardiovascular and Chronic Lung Diseases," on July 22, 2011.** In this report, the IOM presents a conceptual framework for national surveillance of cardiovascular and chronic lung disease and calls on the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to adopt it. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/A-Nationwide-Framework-for-Surveillance-of-Cardiovascular-and-Chronic-Lung-Diseases.aspx>

Legislation

- **H.R.2625** (introduced July 22, 2011): The *Research Participants Protection Modernization Act of 2011* was Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Diana DeGette [CO-1]
- **H.R.2642** (introduced July 26, 2011): The *Hudson Valley VA Health Care System Campus Protection Act* was referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Sponsor: Representative Nan A. S. Hayworth [NY-19]

- **H.R.2646** (introduced July 26, 2011): The *Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act of 2011* was referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Sponsor: Representative Bill Johnson [OH-6]
- **H.R.2649** (introduced July 26, 2011): The *Personal Health Investment Today Act of 2011* was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means
Sponsor: Representative Kevin Brady [TX-8]
- **H.R.2662** (introduced July 26, 2011): The *Health Equity Act of 2011* was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Reid J. Ribble [WI-8]
- **H.R.2671** (introduced July 27, 2011): To amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for the establishment and maintenance of an undiagnosed diseases network, and for other purposes was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative John R. Carter [TX-31]
- **H.R.2674** (introduced July 27, 2011): To amend section 340B of the Public Health Service Act to improve the provision of discounts on drug purchases for certain safety net providers was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.
Sponsor: Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers [WA-5]
- **H.R.2676** (introduced July 27, 2011): To lower health premiums and increase choice for small businesses referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative David Schweikert [AZ-5]
- **H.AMDT.747 to H.R.2584** (introduced July 26, 2011): An amendment to increase Indian Health Services by \$4.4 million was agreed to by voice vote.
Sponsor: Representative Paul A. Gosar [AZ-1]
- **S.1415** (introduced July 26, 2011): 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]

Hill Hearings

- The House and Senate will hold a joint hearing on **Sept. 21, 2011**, to receive legislative presentation from the American Legion.

Meetings / Conferences

- The Science of Compassion: Future Directions in End-of-Life and Palliative Care Summit will be held on **Aug. 10-12, 2011**, in Bethesda Md. www.ninr.nih.gov/scienceofcompassion
- National Veterans Small Business Conference and Exposition will be held on **August 15-18, 2011**, in New Orleans.
- CFHA's 13th Annual Conference: Accelerating Adoption of Collaborative Care: Reaching the Tipping Point will be held on **Oct. 27-29, 2011**, in Philadelphia, Pa. <http://www.cfha.net/pages/Conference/>
- 2011 Congress on Reducing Hospital Readmissions will be held on **Aug. 11-12, 2011**, in Las Vegas, Nev. <http://www.globalmediadynamics.com/upcoming-events/hospital-readmissions/register-for-congress>
- The National Medical Home Summit West will be held on **Sept. 20-22, 2011**, in San Francisco, Calif. <http://www.medicalhomesummit.com/>
- Advances in Neuropsychiatric Treatment Conference will be held on **Sept. 22-23, 2011**, in San Francisco, Calif. http://www.qtcbio.com/index.php?option=com_conference
- The 13th annual World Vaccine Congress will be held **Oct. 10-13, 2011**, in Lyon, France. <http://www.terrapinn.com/2011/world-vaccine-congress-lyon/index.stm>
- American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA) 2011 Annual Symposium will be held on **Oct. 22-26, 2011**, in Washington, DC. <https://www.amia.org/amia2011>
- CFHA's 13th Annual Conference: Accelerating Adoption of Collaborative Care: Reaching the Tipping Point on **Oct. 27-29, 2011**, in Philadelphia, Pa. <http://www.cfha.net/pages/Conference/>
- The American Public Health Association Annual Meeting & Exposition will be held on **Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 2011**, in Washington D.C. <http://www.apha.org/meetings/>
- The CDC's 2011 Symposium on Identification, Screening and Surveillance of HCV Infections in the Era of Improved Therapy for Hepatitis C will be held on **Dec. 1-2, 2011**, in Atlanta Ga. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcvsymposium2011/>
- 17th Annual Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Conference will be held on **Dec. 14-16, 2011**, in New Orleans, La. <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MCHEpi/Conference/AboutConference.htm>
- mHealth Summit will held on **Dec. 5-7, 2011**, in Washington, D.C. <http://www.mhealthsummit.org/>
- The International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases 2012 (ICEID) will be held on **March 11-14, 2012**, in Atlanta, Ga. <http://www.cdc.gov/eid/content/16/11/e1.htm>
- The 15th International Congress on Infectious Diseases (ICID) will be held on **June 13-16, 2012**, in Bangkok, Thailand. http://www.isid.org/15th_ICID/

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/subscribe.cfm>. To unsubscribe, please send an email to newsletter@fedhealthinst.org with UNSUBSCRIBE as the subject.

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