



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH

Institute for Health Policy and Leadership

August 8, 2018 | Issue 25

Healthcare News At A Glance



National

Researchers find that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) assigned oversight for fentanyl drugs to pharmaceutical companies— Researchers at Johns Hopkins found that the FDA was aware that the pharmaceutical companies assigned were partaking in illegal activities that involved pressuring prescribers to give higher doses and advertising alternative uses of the medication.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will continue with public disclosure of errors made in the hospital— CMS had previously proposed removing the disclosure of hospital errors after the American Hospital Association purportedly requested the 2016 President-elect to remove the measures. In efforts to improve transparency, however, CMS will go back to reporting the data through Hospital Compare, but there has been no information about how this data will be collected.

Young generation of physicians urges the American Medical Association (AMA) to reconsider its stance on single-payer— The American Medical Association has been in opposition to single-payer predominantly because of the potential for substantial cuts in physicians' salaries. In a June meeting, younger physicians from the medical student caucus argued that health care is a basic right that can be achieved through single-payer. Multiple polls conducted online also indicated increasing support for single-payer amongst younger physicians. Some of the older members of the AMA may consider changing the AMA's stance.

New final rules will allow short-term health insurance plans to be sold for up to 1 year and renewable for up to 3 years— A senior adviser to the Secretary of Health and Human Services stated that these plans may not be equivalent in coverage but will help introduce more options for people who are facing high premiums. Since these plans will not be required to follow the stipulations of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), they may exclude multiple benefits and put annual and lifetime caps on others. Critics of these plans also argue that the plans will cause ACA premiums to increase considerably.

Noteworthy Research Articles

1. *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Internal Medicine*- Researchers studied a cohort of 445 unsheltered homeless individuals in Massachusetts and found that unsheltered homeless individuals had a three times higher mortality rate than sheltered homeless individuals. Chronic disease and alcohol use disorder were amongst the top reasons for death.
2. *Science Translational Medicine*- When testing the alcohol tolerance of *Enterococcus faecium*, a multi-drug resistant bacterium, samples from 2011 to 2015 were 10 times more likely to have alcohol tolerance than samples from 1997 to 2010.
3. *JAMA Surgery*- Researchers studied injury data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) between 2000 and 2016. They found that all injuries have increased over time with steep increases from 2014 to 2016. Two-thirds of the homicides were related to firearms, and black, non-Latino individuals had the highest mortality rate increases. The researchers stated that there were no simple conclusions as to why this was happening.
4. *Health Affairs*- In the 29 states (and District of Columbia) that expanded Medicaid between 2014 and 2015, there was close to a 40 percent increase in diabetes drug prescriptions filled. For every 1,000 prescriptions filled, expansion states had 30 more prescriptions than non-expansion states.
5. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*- In a study of Florida emergency room records between 1991 and 2010, the survival rate was 1.5 percentage points higher for males treated by female physicians than for females treated by male physicians.

California

New Medi-Cal diabetes prevention program to start next year after state data indicated discrepancy of health outcomes for low-income diabetics– State data shows that more than 12,000 Californians have had limbs or toes lost to diabetes in 2016, indicating an increase of nearly 33 percent. Moreover, diabetes prevalence is also increasing. The new program, which will receive \$5 million per year from 2019 to 2025, will begin next year to provide high-risk Medi-Cal patients with a prevention plan that will include coaching for diet and healthy behaviors. This program is expected to save the \$45 million that goes to diabetes treatment every year.

Physicians note increase of trauma and other injuries related to electric scooters in San Francisco– As some of the electric scooter companies aim to expand, physicians are concerned over issues of safety with regards to injuries from these and other electric transportation devices. Electric scooters became popular in San Francisco recently as a pay-as-you-go vehicle service. One of the prominent companies is reported to be creating a safety advisory council.

News and other reminders of wildfires may trigger anxiety and stress amongst survivors of fires from previous years– Some survivors have reported symptoms of panic, grief, and anxiety when they hear about wildfires or sense triggers such as smoke or even an “orange-tinged sky.” Psychologists are assuring people that the experience is normal and that people suffering from this can try and calm themselves by talking through the lack of an imminent threat or keeping themselves busy in other things.

Other States

Hundreds hospitalized during Illinois’ biggest music festival of the year– The numbers were lower this year (around 160 people) compared to the number of people taken to the hospital last year (234 people) during the Lollapalooza festival in Chicago. The hospitalizations are being attributed to the high temperatures which remained above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. One adolescent passed away after suffering a seizure.

New Illinois state law allows parents to administer medical marijuana on school property– The parents will be allowed to administer the medication after demonstrating that the child is eligible to receive it and the parent is eligible to administer it.

Patients ensured under Blue Cross Blue Shield in Texas (BCBS) will not be covered for receiving treatment in out-of-network emergency room if it is determined that the visit could have been sought somewhere less expensive– The company defended the policy by saying that the reviewer will be a physician and that consumers will be allowed to appeal the decision. According to the president of some of the Texas BCBS offices, the policy is intended to cut down on abuse and fraud. Critics of this policy feel that it will disincentivize people from seeking timely care.

Correction facilities in Massachusetts and other states are beginning to offer medication-assisted treatment to inmates– Some of the largest jails will soon be offering their prisoners opioid addiction treatments if they are not already doing so. One Massachusetts jail noted \$12,500 in savings for each inmate every year after providing buprenorphine to 240 inmates. Many of these jails also observed a reduction in deaths from opioid overdoses or withdrawal.

Florida physicians say trials using Zika to fight a childhood cancer are showing promise– Neuroblastoma is a type of cancer that affects premature nerve cells in young children. Physicians believe that the Zika virus can be used to attack the cancerous cells without having any effect on the child. A CDC study found, however, that a much higher percentage of Zika-exposed babies have microencephaly (by age 1) than was previously thought because babies can develop microencephaly later even after looking normal at birth.

Michigan’s General Motors (GM) signs a direct contract with Henry Ford Health to provide healthcare services to up to 24,000 employees– This is the first direct contract in Michigan for a self-insured company. The contract will last five years and will require the health system to ensure that quality and cost metrics are achieved such as customer service targets as well as objectives for diabetes prevalence and emergency room visitations. While Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan will be aiding in processing payments for the claims, the prices will be directly negotiated between GM and Henry Ford Health.

Healthcare news from around the world

Malawi

A series of poverty-related health conditions such as malnutrition, malaria, and HIV coupled with lack of hygiene, access to clean water, and lack of electricity are leading to superbug infections, especially in infants. More than 12.6 million people are in poverty. In 2016, 20 percent of babies died due to infection.

Italy

A law requiring schoolchildren in Italy to be vaccinated was established in 2017 after a measles outbreak affected more than 5,000 children. This law may be suspended for a year if a new amendment passes the lower house of parliament. Scientists and parents are alarmed as some have called the vaccinations “useless” and “dangerous.”

Congo

The United Nations classified an Ebola outbreak as the highest security threat in the northeastern province of Congo known as North Kivu. There has been political turmoil amongst militia groups. The World Health Organization has urged vaccination teams to go with armed escorts.

Newsbytes Relevant to Our Strategic Priorities



To bring focus to our work, the Institute for Health Policy and Leadership has identified three strategic priorities: oral health, mental health and hunger as a health issue. This segment highlights news articles relevant to these priorities.

Oral Health

An updated Surgeon General’s Report on oral health is coming soon– Last month, the US Department of Health and Human Services announced that an updated report will be coming after nearly 18 years since the last one was published. The focus will be more-or-less the same in discussing the link between oral health and other health outcomes as well as oral health’s effect on economic well-being.

Hunger as a Health Issue

Venezuelans continue to suffer from hunger– As reported a few months earlier, the people of Venezuela have been starving as the country is going through an economic crisis. The leader is refusing aid from other countries, so its citizens are left hungry and without proper medical care. The hospitals are in disarray with broken machines, lack of disinfectants, and no medications. Many fled, but those who remained are suffering from severe weight loss and malnutrition. One article reported that mortality for children under the age of 4 weeks has more than doubled in the last three years.

Mental/ Behavioral Health

Puerto Ricans suffering from a mental health crisis after 10 months of dealing with initial repercussions of Hurricane Maria– As is common after a natural disaster, the survivors of Hurricane Maria are suffering from worsened feelings of depression and hopelessness that were already prevalent due to the recession and unemployment. The island is lacking healthcare resources as self-reported suicide attempts are increasing. Children are also suffering from such effects as schools have been shut down and playgrounds have been closed off due to debris.

Would you like to receive our newsletter on a weekly basis? Please send an email to Ihpl.llu.edu to subscribe!