

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT:

"We have seen since that time that workforce shortages prevent the vast majority of nursing homes from meeting the mandates" Andy Aronson, president and CEO of the Health Care Association of New Jersey

"We did get some agreement that meant workers who had been there for a period of time - with seniority - would not be making less money than the new workers" UFCW Local 27 Representative Jeffrey Hedrick on new contract between the union and Kentmere Rehabilitation and Health Care Center in Wilmington, DE

"Working conditions in long-term care generally remain poor, and it is difficult to attract and retain LTC workers" Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report on European countries healthcare situation (but the authors contend is applicable to the U.S.)

What??? Termed for Theft Granted Unemployment Pay

An Iowa nursing home worker who was fired and charged with stealing at least \$30,000 worth of jewelry from an elderly resident is entitled to jobless benefits.

Charles U. Wolfe worked for Cottage Grove Place, a Cedar Rapids nursing home, as a full-time resident assistant until he was fired in April 2023.

According to court records Wolfe claimed he found the jewels. Police allege he used two female associates to pawn the items at different locations in eastern Iowa.

In granting unemployment benefits, the judge ruled the facility had presented no actual evidence of Wolfe's guilt.

Iowa Capital Dispatch, 07/13/2023

CMS to Make SNF Ownership, Performance Data Clearer

It's characterized as the next phase in a multi-step process to bring increased transparency to LTC whose owners and investors have been targeted by the Biden Administration.

CMS has begun posting Care Compare nursing home affiliations in an attempt to make it easier for consumers to see related facilities and understand their overall performance.

In addition to linking facilities by common owners, the agency will post aggregate nursing home performance data on data.cms.gov and publish combined inspection, staffing, quality and other metrics across groups of nursing homes that share owners or operators.

McKnight's, 06/28/2023

Senate Bill Would Enhance Care Compare

A proposed Senate bill aims to make Care Compare easier to find and more user-friendly for those seeking nursing home information.

The bill requires the HHS Secretary to make the website and its data more findable online by reviewing and updating the search engine and it asks CMS to study user analytics and submit a report on those to the Senate.

The report would be benchmarked against analytics a year later to see if search engine and other adjustments are changing consumer behavior.

Many nursing home operators have blasted it for lack of context and frequently outdated measures.

McKnight's, 06/27/2023

Lawmakers asking for Speedier Prior Auths

Nearly 300 members of Congress (61 senators, 233 representatives) are urging federal regulators to do more to reduce burdensome Medicare Advantage requirements that can slow delivery of care to nursing home residents.

Chief among the proposals was a call for quick electronic prior authorization

decisions for routinely approved services.

A CMS rule limits MA insurers to using prior authorizations only in cases when a diagnosis is unclear, which was expected to lead to easier transfers of hospital patients to nursing homes. However, nursing home stays are a top service denied by MA plans.

McKnight's, 06/26/2023

SNFs in Receivership, But No Clinical Issues

Two Rhode Island nursing homes, Herbert Health in Smithfield and Trinity Health and Rehabilitation Center in Woonsocket have been placed into receivership.

Unlike recent facilities forced down this path, attorney Jeremy Savage, the receiver, said there are no regulatory problems.

Savage said state "has no regulatory concerns with the quality of care being provided at these facilities."

Savage implicated the national nursing home workforce crisis and a delayed funding increase in Rhode Island as the reasons for the action.

Go Local, 06/23/2023

Florida HQ'ed Provider Bails Out of the Florida Market

AdventHealth, the Altamonte Springs, Florida is exiting Florida's nursing home market, citing the costs necessary to run the facilities as exceeding what the company is willing to invest.

The health system, which ranks as the state's largest by member hospitals, confirmed that it sold all ten of its skilled nursing facilities – eight in Florida – to third-party operators.

The decision comes on the heels of a reported \$838 million loss in 2022.

AdventHealth saw a decrease of approximately \$1.2 billion in its investment returns compared to a gain of \$524.9 million in 2021.

The Capitalist, 06/13/2023

IN THE TRENCHES – COVID-19 in the States, The SNFs, The World

U.S. MIDWEST: CDC is tracking a new COVID-19 variant that – for now – appears to be clustered in a handful of midwestern states. EU.1.1, a subvariant of the omicron strain, currently accounts for about 1.7% of all U.S. cases. In six states, however – Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming – it now accounts for 8.7% of cases. Utah accounts for the greatest number of infections (**AL.com**).

AMERICA: Senior intelligence officials remain more convinced than ever that the agencies are not going to be able to collect a piece of evidence that solves the puzzle of where the coronavirus originated. Local and national authorities in China, U.S. officials say, destroyed some virus samples and used up others in research, all of which might have helped answer the questions over COVID's origins. But those officials also caution against overstating the importance of the destroyed samples (**New York Times**).

THE WORLD: The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered massive increases in various mental illnesses worldwide for people of all ages, with a 25% increase in global anxiety and depression during the first year alone. Major contributing factors include unprecedented stress from social isolation, worries of coronavirus infection, financial and relational impact from work environment changes, and an overall fear of the unknown (**The Good Men Project**).

ONTARIO, CANADA: A report from ICES, a non-profit research institute, determined that while immigrants, refugees and other newcomers make up just over 25% of the Ontario population, they accounted for 43.5% of all COVID-19 cases. Further, Of those tested for COVID-19, refugees had the highest percent positivity: in those tested (10.4% vs 7.6% in other immigrants and 2.9% in Canadian-born and long-term residents (**ICES**).

WEST VIRGINIA: To encourage vaccinations some states used taxpayer money to fund vaccine lotteries. CBS

News reported federal investigators subpoenaed Gov. Jim Justice's office about the sweepstakes. The focus is car dealers that supplied trucks that were given to lottery winners and questions about how much they cost taxpayers (**CBS News**).

AMERICA: During the public health emergency, pharmacies that administered vaccines to nursing home patients not only took care of billing, but also managed data collection and reporting. Effective July 1, this responsibility – for Part A residents – has reverted to providers (**Provider Magazine**).

THE WORLD: New research published in *BMC Medicine* suggests that using antidepressants (ADs), especially selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), could help prevent COVID-19 infection. Mental health patients with a recent (previous 90 days) prescription for an SSRI had an almost 40% reduction in the likelihood of a positive COVID-19 test (**CIDRAP**).

UNITED KINGDOM: The UK had one of the worst increases in death rates of major European economies during the COVID pandemic, BBC analysis has found. Death rates in the UK were more than 5% higher on average each year of the pandemic than in the years just before it, largely driven by a huge death toll in the first year. That was above the increase seen in France, Spain or Germany, but below Italy and significantly lower than the US (**BBC**).

THE WORLD: An *Epoch Times* article cited an April study, which has not been peer-reviewed, that found part of a DNA sequence called an "SV40 promoter" in two expired Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine vials but one of the study's authors said it's not the same as simian virus 40, or SV40, which can cause tumors in monkeys. Monkey DNA and the SV40 virus also are not listed among the ingredients in the COVID-19 vaccines that federal regulators have approved for use. Pfizer told PolitiFact that monkey DNA was not used in its vaccine (**PolitiFact**).

THE WORLD: Air pollution is known to be a major risk factor in aggravating respiratory diseases. Now a study indicates people exposed to air pollution experienced Covid-19 as if they were 10 years older. The Belgian study also showed that air pollution levels measured in patients' blood were linked to a 36% increase in the risk of needing intensive care treatment. A separate study in Denmark showed air pollution exposure was linked to a 23% increase in the risk of death from Covid-19 (**The Guardian**).

GEORGIA: A Richmond County man was sentenced to 38 months in federal prison for conducting a scheme to submit fraudulent applications for COVID-19 small business relief funding that netted more than \$4.5 million in payments. Kamario Thomas, 42, of Augusta, was sentenced to 38 months in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering (**Augusta Chronicle**).

WASHINGTON, DC: A report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence found no direct evidence of a "biosafety incident" or of the pre-pandemic presence of the virus that causes COVID-19 at a laboratory in Wuhan, China. The newly declassified document added details to a growing body of inconclusive evidence about the origins of the pandemic (**CBS News**).

AMERICA: The largest COVID strain in the U.S. remains XBB.1.5, which accounts for about 27% of the infections. XBB.1.9.2 and XBB.1.9.1 combine for about 24.4% of cases. EU.1.1, a subvariant of the omicron strain currently accounts for just 1.7% of all U.S. cases (**AL.com**).

COVID-19, 07/07/2023

Global Cases – Deaths
767,726,861 – 6,948,764

Global Vaccination Doses
13.461 Billion

U.S. Hospitalizations – Deaths
6,196,466 – 1,134,300

U.S. Vaccination Doses
139,918,910

CDC & WHO

FT Infection Control Should Be Required

The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology recently sent a letter to Congressional leaders calling for a fulltime infection control specialist on LTC staffs to develop procedures to prevent transmission of infectious agents and enforce control standards.

The letter notes that the CDC estimates there are one million to three million infections per year at long-term care facilities.

APIC said in the letter “lessons learned from COVID-19 have proven that IPC needs to be a priority for facilities.”

The association also called for educating surveyors in infection control to ensure they hold facilities accountable.

APIC letter, 06/16/2023

Inflammation May Be Secret Long COVID Culprit

Looking at proteins circulating in the blood, the scientists found a set of molecules associated with inflammation that were present only in a subset of patients with long COVID and were not seen in those who recovered from their disease.

Out of 55 patients with long COVID, about two-thirds had persistently high levels of certain signals of inflammation.

The scientists also looked at blood samples from 25 people who had COVID but recovered, and from 25 volunteers who had never had COVID to their knowledge. Those without long COVID did not show the same signs of inflammation in their blood.

Nature Communications, 06/12/2023

CDC Advisers Recommend RSV Shot for Older Adults

People aged 60 years and older may receive either of two recently approved vaccines for preventing RSV infections, CDC vaccine advisers decided recently.

In two separate votes for two older age groups, the panel concurred that clinical trial data supported use of the vaccines, made by Pfizer and GSK, based on

shared decision-making between a patient and their physician.

The panel voted 9 to 5 in favor of blanket vaccinations for adults aged 65 and older. For patients aged 60 to 64, the panel voted 13 to 1 in favor of decisions made on an individual basis.

CIDRAP, 06/21/2023

LTC Residents Risk Long COVID and its Mental Perils

Federal health officials linked a wide variation of mental health symptoms with post-COVID conditions.

In an advisory from its Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration HHS said some of those mental health issues — including depression, cognitive impairment, anxiety and substance use disorder — are more likely to affect nursing home and other long-term care residents.

HHS noted that rates of mental health conditions are higher for people who were hospitalized with COVID or had a longer duration of COVID symptoms.

Twelve or more weeks after contracting the virus, 32% of survivors reported fatigue and 22% reported cognitive impairments.

McKnight's, 06/22/2023

Discrimination Rampant In Residential Care Facilities

Nurses working in nursing homes are among the most likely to face discrimination on the job, with 88% saying that they had seen or experienced workplace racism by patients.

When it came to their colleagues, 62% of nursing home and home health workers surveyed for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation said they'd seen or been subject to racism or discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

Overall, 79% reported facing racism from patients, with 59% reporting similar behavior among colleagues.

And while 40% of nurses reported observing or experiencing discrimination from their supervisors, only 23% formally reported it.

McKnight's, 06/01/2023

ONE COLUMN

Vaccine Effectiveness? All Were Very Effective

Early in December 2020, the COVID-19 messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine from Pfizer/BioNTech was rolled out in the United Kingdom, followed by the Moderna and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines.

In a recent study of over 580,000 individuals 16+ in England, one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine reduced the likelihood of hospitalization by 52%, whereas two doses increased vaccine effectiveness (VE) to 56%.

After three doses, the risk of hospitalization declined by almost 78%.

The protection offered by a full primary course and third booster dose was about 68% at three or more months from the third dose.

VE against COVID-19 hospitalization was negative three or more months after the first dose, irrespective of age; however, it was highest in those between 30-64 years and 65-79 years of age after the second dose. Following the third booster dose, VE peaked in the 65-79 years age group at about 88%.

The risk of mortality (death) declined by almost 60% after one vaccine dose. A notable exception is in those over the age of 80, who exhibited almost zero VE with one dose. Protection rose to 90% overall after the second dose; however, it remained lower in those over 80 years old as compared to the high VE in individuals aged 30-79 years.

During the Omicron wave, the COVID-19 vaccine better protected individuals against hospitalization than previous reports; however, VE against mortality declined.

Moreover, VE against hospitalization was higher after the second dose than for either the first or third dose during the Omicron wave. However, VE declined at both three to six months and further reduced to about 40% over six months from the second dose.

News Medical, 06/09/2023

SNF Wins for Now, Court Overturns Verdict

Timely Mission Nursing Home in Buffalo, Iowa won its appeal of a \$6 million verdict although not on the merits of the case; rather on an issue of improperly admitted evidence.

The estate of a resident, who died following a fall, argued that the belligerent attitude of a certain caregiver had made the resident reluctant to ask for help – resulting in the fall.

The Appeals Court ruled that the lower court erred in allowing the prosecutor to include testimony and evidence about abuse, and that the estate of the resident “must show more than rumors” to prove its case.

McKnight's, 06/26/2023

Delaware Nursing Home Staff Ratifies New Contract

Workers at Kentmere Rehabilitation and Health Care Center in Wilmington have signed a new contract with management after nearly six months of contentious negotiations.

The 63 workers at the Wilmington nursing facility reached the agreement with the facility's new management after protracted negotiations over workers' health care plans and other benefits, as well as managements' ability to make decisions unilaterally.

Bargaining broke down in March, prompting a four-week informational picket by workers – rather than a work stoppage.

After unanimously ratifying the new contract, the membership also voted to add the facility's licensed practical nurses to the union.

The Delaware Republic, 06/25/2023

Licenses Renewed Just Before New State Law

California health officials have granted new licenses for two dozen nursing homes run by L.A. businessman Schlomo Rechnitz, one of the most notorious operators in the state.

In 2014 Rechnitz, via bankruptcy court, bought 18 facilities. California neither approved nor denied the applications, instead leaving them pending. Rechnitz continued to run them for years without a formal license in his name – which isn't technically illegal.

A new law was supposed to close that loophole didn't go into effect until July 1. State officials said granting the licenses prevented the evictions of hundreds of residents and provides a two-year monitoring period.

McKnight's, 06/30/2023

FDA Converts Alzheimer's Med to Full Approval

The FDA has given full approval to *Leqembi* (lecanemab-irmb), to treat adult patients with Alzheimer's Disease.

Leqembi is the first amyloid beta-directed antibody to be converted from an accelerated approval to a traditional approval for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. It works by reducing amyloid plaques that form in the brain.

Leqembi was approved in January under the Accelerated Approval pathway. This pathway allows the FDA to approve drugs for serious conditions where there is an unmet medical need.

FDA news release, 07/06/2023

New Ownership, No Pay, Nurses Walk Off

Some nurses at Ryze West, a nursing home in the Chicago area walked off the job last week claiming new ownership has caused major issues with them getting paid.

Staff said in the last pay period, Aliya Healthcare, the management company, paid them then took back the payment.

Those nurses said Aliya Healthcare took over June and since then they have had long-standing issues getting their paychecks on time. Nurses claim they did not get paid during the last pay period, and in this most recent pay period, they said the company took back their money citing a clerical issue.

WLS-TV, 07/05/2023

Briefly IN THE NEWS

CommCare is finalizing its purchase of four of the largest Roman Catholic LTC facilities in the New Orleans area. The deal will give CommCare, which already owns and operates 15 nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities around the state, an additional 800 nursing home beds and apartment units. The total price of the sale has not been disclosed (***NOLO.com***).

A widespread Arizona Medicaid scam that has left an unknown number of Native Americans homeless on the streets of metro Phoenix is being declared a public health state of emergency by the Navajo Nation as fraudulent “sober living homes” targeted by a state crackdown on fraudulent billing lost their funding and turn former residents out onto the streets (***AP News***).

Hospitals and other health care providers in New York would be banned from reporting medical debt to credit agencies under a bill passed by the state's legislature .. the law would make New York the second state, after Colorado, to prohibit medical debt from being collected by credit reporting agencies or included in a credit report (***AP***).

In recent testimony to a congressional subcommittee the Government Accountability Office (GAO) said federal health agencies must urgently tackle key measures of a plan to curb the rising threat of antibiotic-resistant organisms (***GAO***).

More than 25 union workers at Absolut Care of Aurora Park and Absolut Care of Allegany have voted to authorize a week-long strike should an agreement not be reached with the employer. The employees have been without a contract for two months since their 2-year deal expired April 30 (***1199SEIU news release***).

Heartland Healthcare Services in south Toledo will close its doors later this year, laying off over 150 employees in a move that cites and unforeseen loss of business as a reason for the closure. Heartland is a long-term care pharmacy with locations in Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania and Maryland. It was established in 1994 (***WTOL-TV***).