

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT:

"Americans die younger than their counterparts elsewhere because when corporate profits conflict with health, our politicians side with the corporations" from study Missing Americans: Early death in the United States—1933–2021

"We're going to have three bugs out there, three viruses: Covid, of course, flu and RSV, We need to make sure the American people understand all three and what they can do to protect themselves" Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of CDC

Her Docs Walked Her Down the Aisle

Sherri Shaw found a special way to thank her doctors for saving her life after her battle with stage three colorectal cancer – she asked oncologists Dr. Emma Holliday and Dr. Van Morris to walk her down the aisle.

When Shaw was diagnosed, she was just two months into relationship with Bill James and told him it was "time to break up."

James refused.

He drove her to her treatments.

When she was cancer-free they decided to marry.

Dr. Holliday said oncologists are more often invited to funerals. "So, this was such a beautiful thing to be invited to participate in."

CBS News, 07/27/2023

We Should Toot Our Own Horn

In 2020 a total, 509,179 people age 65+ diagnosed with dementia died – 94,688 more than researchers estimated would have died had the pandemic not happened.

In 2021, the number of "excess" deaths — or those not expected to perish — dropped by 77% to less than 22,000.

Those facts have led researchers in a recent study to suggest that the better care offered in nursing homes compared to that provided at home mitigated the COVID death rates.

The authors said access to vaccines as well as the care provided in an LTC facility appear to be important factors.

JAMA Neurology, 07/17/2023.

CMS Finalizes 4% Pay Raise Still No Minimum Staffing Info

Nursing homes will get a higher-than-expected 4.0% increase in their Medicare Part A payments in fiscal 2024.

But major provider organizations immediately called the extra 0.3% too little to offset increasing costs, especially those likely to blossom from an expected federal staffing minimum.

The net increase represents a \$1.4 billion hike, slightly higher than the \$1.2 million proposed in an April draft rule.

The final rule came with no further info about minimum staffing standards which are still being reviewed by the White House Office of Management and Budget.

McKnight's, 08/01/2023

Compensation Keeps Rising at All Levels Of LTC

Nursing home salaries — including those of executives — continued their upward trajectory with many facilities responding to staffing shortfalls by increasing hourly rates and offering signing bonuses.

Nursing home administrator salaries averaged \$127,763, up 3.6% from in 2022. Assistant administrators enjoyed a

5.69% average increase, to \$92,514 and DONs. saw their average pay climb 4.67% to \$108,889.

The national hourly pay rate for RNs in 2023 was \$37.86; for LPNs, it was \$29.66; and for CNAs, it was \$18.68.

The findings are from the 2023-2024 HCS Nursing Home Salary & Benefits Report.

Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service,
July 2023

It's a 'Pay Me Now Or Pay Me Later' Mentality

Federal regulators this week finalized plans to make appeal waivers automatic in the case of most nursing home CMPs.

Originally the 35% CMP reduction for nursing homes was designed to reduce administrative work for CMS.

But now that the waiver and the reduction – starting October 2 – will be automatic if an appeal is not filed within 60 days, CMS has indicated it might also walk back the penalty reduction.

The move is projected to save providers \$2.3 million annually, with about \$775,000 savings for CMS.

McKnight's, 08/04/2023

It's Too Damned Hot! New Jersey SNF Can't Admit

State regulators this month ordered a Camden, NJ nursing home to halt admissions after an air-conditioning failure caused the temperature in some patient rooms to reach 92 degrees – 11 degrees above the limit.

Surveyors discovered air-conditioning on one floor at Majestic Center for Rehab and Subacute Care had not been working since July 6.

Majestic Center was also cited for violating a regulation requiring nursing homes to have an administrator with a current New Jersey license.

The facility was fined \$305,200 in February when a resident attacked his roommate and was allowed to continue living in the same room afterwards.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, 07/28/2023

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

AMERICA: Researchers from the University of California–San Francisco et al analyzed data from 2.3 million US death certificates for those 65 and older with Alzheimer disease and related dementias. Most striking was the reduction in deaths among long-term care facility residents, where excess deaths went from 34,259 in year 1 to -22,050 in year 2 after vaccines became available (**CIDRAP**).

CANADA: Newly discovered antibodies can neutralize virtually all known variants of COVID-19 and may have the potential to prevent future coronavirus outbreaks. A study in the peer-reviewed *Science Advances* journal describes how a team of researchers was able to isolate potent neutralizing antibodies from a recovered SARS patient, who was vaccinated against COVID-19, that “exhibited remarkable breadth” against known sarbecoviruses, or respiratory viruses, like SARS and COVID-19 (**CTV**).

SOUTH DAKOTA: In its July monthly update, the South Dakota Department of Health reported 294 new cases, 25 new hospitalizations and one new death since a June update. In total for the 2022-23 season, there’s been 21,790 total cases, 1,030 hospitalizations and 161 deaths. It’s the lowest level of infections since the beginning of the pandemic (**KELO-TV**).

AMERICA: In June, the FDA recommended that Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers make single-strain booster shots for this fall and winter that would target the currently circulating Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5. Those updated vaccines are expected to be made available in mid-to late September, should the FDA authorize them and the CDC recommend them. They will be the first COVID-19 vaccines made available directly from the manufacturers as part of the commercial market, rather than through the US government (**CNN**).

AMERICA: Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said during an investor call last week that the FDA could authorize Pfizer’s updated Covid boosters by the end of August, The drugmaker asked the FDA in June to authorize an updated version of its Covid booster that is designed to target the

XBB.1.5 subvariant, a coronavirus strain that began circulating widely last winter. Moderna made a similar request in June. The requests came days after the FDA advised the drugmakers to update the shots to target XBB.1.5 ahead of a fall Covid booster campaign (**NBC News**).

FLORIDA: Four members of Tampa-area family, called “snake oil salesmen” by prosecutors, were convicted of selling a toxic industrial bleach as a fake COVID-19 cure through their online church. A federal jury in Miami found Mark Grenon, 65, and his sons, Jonathan, Joseph and Jordan, guilty of conspiring to defraud the United States and deliver misbranded drugs. They could get five years when sentenced in October (**Miami Herald**).

ITALY: A large (over two million people) retrospective study out of Italy showed a second booster with an mRNA bivalent vaccine offered the best protection against severe COVID-19 due to the Omicron BA.5 variant in older adults, and protection appeared to wane less than with the monovalent shot (**MedPage Today**).

WASHINGTON, D.C: A top FDA official wants Congress to dedicate full-time staff to emerging pathogens, after the FDA scrambled to find people for Covid-19 priorities like Operation Warp Speed. “Vaccines were a pretty heavy-duty lift during the pandemic,” said Peter Marks, director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, at a Thursday Politico event. “Rather than having to essentially reassign whole groups of people and disrupt things, the idea is to have a group of people who are constantly working on this” (**Stat**).

NORTH CAROLINA: A federal grand jury has indicted Charlotte business owner Glynn Paul Hubbard Jr on charges he schemed more than \$1.2 million in fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program loans for himself and his customers. The indictment alleges Hubbard falsified information in loan applications and provided false financial information, fake employment data and fraudulent tax returns for his businesses (**Business North Carolina**).

WALL STREET: Humanigen, the NJ-based biotech company warned in an SEC filing last week that it likely won’t survive after its COVID-19 antibody was rejected by the FDA in fall 2021. The company said it is “exploring all restructuring options, which may include commencing a bankruptcy or other insolvency proceeding sometime in the third quarter of 2023” (**Endpoints News**).

AMERICA: The next global pandemic could come from the U.S. according to a report from Harvard Law School and New York University where teams are examining how humans, livestock and wild animals interact. While Americans often think “it couldn’t happen here,” said one researcher, but “regulations are so loose and interactions so frequent, that it could happen here (**USA Today**).

CANADA: In a university study, worsened pain and greater functional limitations relative to their status prior to COVID-19 infection were reported by most individuals in Laval, Quebec, who had some type of arthritis and developed post-acute COVID symptoms following initial infection. About 37% had increased pain, 42% complained of being out of breath when climbing stairs and just over half had increased fatigue (**MedPage Today**).

AMERICA: The National Institutes of Health launched and is opening enrollment for phase 2 clinical trials that will evaluate at least four potential treatments for long COVID, with additional clinical trials to test at least seven more treatments expected in the coming months. Treatments will include drugs, biologics, medical devices and other therapies (**nih.gov**).

COVID-19, 08/04/2023

Global Cases – Deaths
768,983,095 – 6,953,743

U.S. Hospitalizations – Deaths
6,224,831 – 1,136,472

Global – U.S. Vaccination Doses
13.5 Billion – 144,182,870

CDC & WHO

Beware – There's An Uptick in COVID-19 Cases

Experts are seeing a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases, signaling a late-summer jump that could hit nursing homes harder than the general population.

The CDC reported an overall jump in cases among nursing home residents throughout the month of July, although the numbers shifted from week to week.

For the week ending July 2, the CDC reported 2,834 cases among facility residents; that number jumped to 3,145 confirmed cases for the week ending July 23.

Although deaths continue to fall to the lowest level since the CDC began tracking, hospitalizations have increased which could elevate deaths.

McKnight's, 08/01/2023

Researchers: Caregivers Deserve More Support

Researchers at the University of Michigan analyzed data from almost 1.4 million ER visits by Alzheimer's and dementia patients and concluded those who care for this type of patient should receive more support.

They said their study fills a major knowledge-gap that exists despite common knowledge that ER visits are common.

Alzheimer's and dementia patients account for approximately 7% of all emergency room visits for people 65+.

As a result, the researchers suggested behavioral changes and environmental factors affecting dementia patients in nursing homes should be scrutinized in an effort to reduce ER visits.

McKnight's, 07/26/2023

First Ever County-Level Alzheimer's Count

East and Southeast US states have the highest prevalence of Alzheimer's dementia, according to the first county-level study of disease occurrence.

For counties with populations of 10,000 or more adults aged 65+, Rush

University Medical Center researchers estimate that the highest Alzheimer's prevalence rates are in Miami-Dade County, FL, Baltimore City, MD, and Bronx County, NY (all 16.6%).

Other counties in Maryland, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, California and Texas also came in at 15% or more.

The Alzheimer's Association projects the West and Southwest regions of the nation will experience the largest percentage increase between 2020 and 2025.

*Alzheimer's & Dementia:
The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association
July 2023*

Court Orders Second Monitor in Fraud Case

New York Attorney General Letitia James has successfully petitioned the courts for a preliminary injunction that requires Centers Health Care, accused of committing more than \$83 million in Medicare and Medicaid fraud, to pay for an independent financial monitor.

Earlier, a lawyer for the Centers accused James of trying to "weaponize" the monitor by granting him broad powers.

Another court-appointed monitor was assigned earlier in the month to assess the ongoing quality of care at Centers' facilities.

Centers has been accused of inappropriately using Medicare and Medicaid funds to help purchase the Israeli airline El Al, among other things.

McKnight's, 07/31/2023

Nurse's License Suspended After Homicide Charges

A Pennsylvania nurse accused of killing two patients had her nursing license suspended indefinitely by the state.

Heather Pressdee, 40, was charged with giving lethal doses of insulin to three patients, two of whom are not diabetic, at a SNF in Chicora, Pa., in 2022.

A 55-year-old man died Dec. 4, an 83-year-old man died Dec. 25 and a 73-year-old man was hospitalized Aug. 31 after seizing.

Becker's, 07/28

ONE COLUMN

SNF-Hospital Transitions Hurt by Lax Best Practices

Hospital discharge to skilled nursing facilities can benefit from certain protocols that are currently missing when patients make this transition between care settings.

While the complexity of care transitions between nursing homes and hospitals is well known, investments in programs like Age Friendly Health Systems (AFHS) have become key to ensuring continuity of knowledge and practices across care settings.

However, a study recently published in JAMDA suggests it appears efforts to implement AFHS in hospitals and care settings accessed by older adults has been lacking.

Specifically, there needs to be more focus, more resources and attention on hospital-SNF transitions if AFHS is to work the way it was intended.

Three near-term opportunities were identified in the JAMDA study: hospitals using preferred SNF partnerships to promote continuity, a broader strategy to develop a discharge plan focused on AFHS's "4Ms," and hospitals investing in local training programs for post-acute care facilities focused on the 4Ms and 4Ms during transitions.

Care settings have been slow to pick up the program's 4Ms framework, which stands for What Matters, Medication, Mentation and Mobility. And these protocols have not been appropriately adopted across multiple health care settings.

the study found setting-specific implementation of the 4Ms framework misses opportunities to support care transitions for older adults.

SNFs should partner with hospitals who have tailored the 4Ms to transitional care activities, ensuring that such practices can be continued in the SNF setting.

AFHS was developed by the John A. Hartford Foundation and others.

Skilled Nursing News, 07/12/2023

Not Everyone Is In Love With “Barbenheimer.”

Vaccine researcher Dr. Peter Hotez has gone viral for warning that summer blockbusters “Barbie” and “Oppenheimer” could spark an explosion of COVID-19 cases — as critics slammed the doomsday doc for his dire prediction.

“Not to be a Debbie Downer ... but anyone worried about a post-BarbieBoxOffice Covid bump?” Hotez tweeted. “We’ll probably never know since no one seems to be keeping track of such things anymore,”

Barbiemania is growing as the Greta Gerwig-directed comedy garnered \$162 million at the box office — while Christopher Nolan’s three-hour epic about the life of nuclear physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer took in \$82 million.

New York Post, 07/25/2023

LTC Commission Proposed But Without Providers

Two US senators are proposing a new national advisory commission on long-term care services, but the legislation creating it does not appear to include nursing home representatives.

Sens. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and John Boozman (R-AR) introduced the Supporting Our Seniors Act, which would create the Commission on Long-Term Care with 12 members appointed by the President and top Congressional leaders. The legislation does not mention nursing homes or providers.

That body would report regularly to Congress on service delivery, financing, workforce adequacy and other issues related to long-term care to help increase access by seniors and others.

McKnight’s, 08/02/2023

MA Plan to Give Uncle Sugar Back \$22 Million

Martin’s Point Health Care A Medicare Advantage plan in Portland, Maine will pay \$22.5 million to settle allegations that it systematically reviewed patient charts to tack on additional charges before submitting claims to Medicare.

The DOJ said the MA violated the False Claims Act by submitting inaccurate

diagnosis codes for its plan enrollees in Maine and New Hampshire to increase reimbursement.

The settlement agreement with Martin’s Point described how from 2016 to 2019 the plan tried to game the risk-adjustment system by changing patient demographics and diagnoses to land higher payments from CMS. From 2016 to 2019.

DOJ news release, 07/31/2023

It Tackles Nurse Shortage But Don’t Hold Your Breath

A measure sponsored by State Senator Karina Villa designed to address the shortage of nurses in health care facilities across Illinois was signed into law last week.

Relief will not be immediate, however.

Villa’s law directs the Nursing Workforce Center to develop strategies to make sure proper actions are being taken to address the statewide nurse shortage by distributing a nursing workforce supply survey with all license renewals beginning in 2024.

By 2027, the Nursing Workforce Center will develop a nurse demand and employer survey that will be collected biennially.

Illinois Senate Democrats Caucus news release, 07/28/2023

State Offers Federal Bucks to Avoid LTC

New Hampshire is pursuing two projects, one at the county level and the other statewide, that would allow people who qualify for a nursing facility to remain at home if that is their choice.

One project would give a New Hampshire county federal funding to coordinate or enhance services within the community for people who qualify for Medicare and Medicaid. Services could include transportation, social services, physical therapy, meals, home care, or adult day care.

Secondly the department wants to conduct a feasibility study to see if those same types of services can be provided at the state level.

New Hampshire Bulletin, 07/27/2023

Briefly IN THE NEWS

Omnicare’s parent company, CVS Health announced during the week it will lay off 5,000 employees and take a restructuring charge of almost \$500 million in association with the layoffs. CEO Karen Lynch said the action is “expected to generate over \$600 million of run rate savings beginning in 2024.” In 2022 CVS Health announced plans to sell Omnicare (*McKnight’s*).

PharMerica, which provides services to more than 3,100 long-term care and other pharmacy programs, was hit with a cybercriminal hack in early March which was not discovered until March 14. A class-action lawsuit charges the approximately 5.8 million consumers who “had their most sensitive personal information accessed, exfiltrated and stolen” were not informed until at least May. The lawsuit noted PharMerica offered affected individuals one year of complimentary credit monitoring, but that “does not adequately address the lifelong harm that victims will face following the data breach.” (*McKnight’s*).

Ensign Group had a good 2Q this year. Net income for the period was \$64.0 million and adjusted net income was \$66.3 million, increases of 10.9% and 15.4%, respectively, compared to the second quarter 2022 (*McKnight’s*).

Researchers from Hebrew SeniorLife and Duke University will split a \$10.5 million grant from the Patient-Centered Outcome Research Institute to conduct the 5.5-year study into osteoporosis care in fracture patients. The study will compare two care models: a fracture liaison service in which recommendations are given to start medications to strengthen bones; and a deprescribing care model, which helps patients reduce medications that cause falls. (*EurekaAlert news release*).

A study of 2,564 Czech healthcare workers, three-quarters women, finds that their prevalence of depression increased twice during the pandemic. In 2020 (Wave 0) 11% had moderate to severe depression. In 2021 (Wave 1) 22% had moderate to severe depression. Stress, caring for COVID-19 patients and deaths were cited as drivers in the increased depression (*CIDRAP*).