

# IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals  
in 100 Words-or-Less

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## THEY SAID IT:

**"Cost control, cutting costs, managing the pennies - that's the not-so-fun part of what we do"** Darrin Hull, executive vice president of Consulting at Health Dimensions Group

**"It looks like it's once again time to MASK UP"** University of Oxford primary healthcare expert Dr Trisha Greenhalgh on the sub-variant BA.6

**"When I think about the crisis in nursing homes during the pandemic, it was largely a system failure rather than a crisis caused by a few bad apples"** Harvard researcher David Grabowski

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## **The LTC Business - It's a Sad State of Affairs**

In a newly released report from AHCA/NCAL labor shortages, inflation and chronic government underfunding have forced nursing homes to limit admissions, downsize or even close entirely.

The report found that during the pandemic and endemic 55% of facilities turned away prospective residents; 48% have waitlists; 21% have downsized beds; and 24% have closed units.

From 2020 until now 579 nursing homes have closed, displacing 21,000 residents; 40% of those that closed had four or five stars.

Only three new nursing homes have opened in 2023 compared to an average of 64 per year between 2020 and 2022.

AHCA, 08/23/2023

## **CMS 5-Claim Audits So Far Are a 'Debacle'**

The new federal "5-Claim" review process designed to lower the rate of improper government payments is a mess. CMS set out last Spring to audit five Medicare Part A claims from every SNF in America saying providers misunderstood billing changes when it switched from RUG IV to PDPM.

But the MACs doing the auditing may be too aggressive. Ultimately, audit problems could lead to facilities losing funding.

Many MDS consultants say documentation being requested is above and beyond the RAI requirements and those decisions should be appealed.

McKnight's, 08/22/2023

## **Veterans Health System Record Hiring Continues**

The Veterans Health Administration has added nearly 49,000 new employees this fiscal year as demand spikes amid a deluge of claims and new enrollment from the PACT Act.

It is closing in on a total goal of 52,000 hires by Sept. 30. The majority are in occupations that directly affect patient care and services, including physicians, RNs, LPNs, and CNAs.

The VA embarked on a hiring spree last year to accommodate increased demand related to the PACT Act, which expanded benefits and health care services to combat veterans across several generations.

Military.com, 08/15/2023

## **New Hampshire Law Clamps Down on Agencies**

The "hostage situations" for nursing homes learning at the last minute that a staffing agency has double-booked a worker are nearing an end in New Hampshire.

A new law approved last week prohibits staffing agencies from scheduling nurses or licensed nurse assistants at multiple assignments and then pushing facilities into bidding wars to obtain staff.

The law also prohibits agencies from using the presence of a "communicable virus" to increase their fees.

A clause that would have forced agencies to disclose fees compared to what they pay workers was eliminated from the law.

McKnight's, 08/17/2023

## **Grabowski: That Ain't 'zactly What I Meant**

After the *New York Times* published an article that some might have wrongly interpreted as holding nursing homes solely responsible for high COVID-19 death and infection rates Harvard researcher Davis Grabowski, quoted in the article, clarified his stance.

Grabowski and study co-author Brian McGarry, both gave the health care system a "D" grade overall for nursing homes' pandemic outcomes and performance.

Grabowski later said he did not assign that grade to SNFs, but rather to the entire policy response failed to protect residents and staff – citing delays in providing PPE and rapid testing as well as isolating residents.

McKnight's, 08/22/2023

## **Healthcare is Dangerous To Your Health**

Healthcare workers have more anecdotal evidence of rising violence in their places of work.

One key data point backs the notion that jobs in nursing homes, hospitals, and other care settings are increasingly high-risk to physical well-being.

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics measures non-fatal injuries by industry. In 2021, the latest data available, private industry employers reported 2.6 million nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses.

Minus illnesses, the healthcare and social services industry recorded 453,200 nonfatal injuries — higher than any other industry.

By comparison, 334,500 nonfatal injuries were recorded in manufacturing and 162,500 in construction.

Becker's Hospital Review, 08/10/2023

## **IN THE TRENCHES - COVID-19 in the States, the SNFs, the World**

**THE WHITE HOUSE:** The Biden administration is allocating \$1 billion for mid-stage COVID-19 vaccine trials to begin this fall, \$300 million for the development of a new monoclonal antibody to protect people who are immunocompromised, and \$100 million to explore new technologies to help prevent and treat the infection. The administration had earlier announced it intended to spend \$5 billion on Project NextGen to help develop new tools to protect against COVID-19. These are the first specific allocations from that pot of money (**USA Today**).

**EUROPE:** Scientists believe we have entered another COVID-19 wave. Since the start of July daily hospital admissions with COVID have been increasing (more than doubled as of 4 August compared to four weeks earlier), and the number of patients in hospital primarily because of COVID has also doubled. Secondary indicators such as the Zoe Symptom Tracker app and Google Trends of searches for COVID-19 symptoms have also been increasing since early July (**British Medical Journal**).

**OHIO:** The number of new COVID-19 cases in Ohio continued climbing for a sixth week in a row to 4,226 this week. But that's nowhere near this year's peak of 13,895 in the week ending January 5. A total of 7,596,700 Ohioans have received at least one vaccination, representing about 68.4% of Ohioans age 5 and up (**Cleveland.com**).

**WASHINGTON state:** Four doctors are suing the Washington Medical Commission, challenging the state licensing body's position statement on COVID-19 misinformation. Three of the doctors hold active licenses in Washington, but are facing disciplinary action related to their alleged care for COVID patients with unproven treatments and "false and misleading" statements regarding the pandemic. The fourth gave up her Washington license earlier this year (**MedPage Today**).

**GERMANY:** In a Saarland University study, 303 people who received the mRNA vaccine were tested two weeks after the booster. The number of "killer T cells" was significantly higher in those who had both shots in the same arm. Those cells, which attack and destroy the other cells they target, were present in 67% of the same-arm cases and only 43% in people who had their injections in different arms (**CNN**).

**TENNESSEE:** COVID-19 hospitalization rates across Tennessee rose 48% between June and July amid signs of a late summer wave sweeping the country. The average hospitalization rate across the country only rose 17% during that time. They're down 82% nationally year over year, and the CDC reports 10,320 overall hospital admissions in the week between July 30-Aug. 5, compared to more than 150,000 in one week in January 2022 (**Axios**).

**UNITED KINGDOM:** A potential contributing factor to a future spread in the virus is a dampening down of vaccines in the UK. More than 12 million people will miss out on a coronavirus vaccine this winter as the numbers being offered a booster jab have been scaled back. A COVID-19 booster will not be offered to healthy people under the age of 65 this winter, health officials said, compared with last year when the autumn booster jab was offered to people aged 50 and over (**Yahoo News**).

**UNITED KINGDOM:** Covid vaccines should be made available for people to buy privately in Britain, leading scientists have urged, amid concerns over a new wave of the virus which could worsen in autumn and winter. Prof Adam Finn, of the University of Bristol, a member of the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization (JCVI), said COVID jabs should be available commercially. "Some employers might want to offer the vaccines to their staff," he added (**The Guardian**).

**AMERICA:** A team of researchers from across the U.S. analyzed data on 4,988 cancer patients worldwide who had lab-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection from

March 2020 to December 2021 and compared the findings to 1869 similar patients in the three months before the pandemic. The researchers found that the relative risk of venous thromboembolism was 33% higher in those taking systemic anticancer treatment compared with those who weren't (**JAMA Oncology**).

**NEVADA:** Kofi Sarfo, a Las Vegas doctor and his wife Rose Sarfo have been indicted for allegedly fraudulently OBTAINING approximately \$1.3 million in COVID-19 pandemic relief loans through the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Rather than spending the money on their business as represented in the loan applications, the Sarfos allegedly used at least some of the funds to purchase stocks and cryptocurrency (**DOJ news release**).

**THE WORLD:** A report found that more than 1 in 5 patients who were hospitalized with Covid-19 – and over 1 in 10 who were not – had been diagnosed with high blood pressure six months later. Compared with people who had influenza, another upper respiratory virus, those hospitalized with Covid-19 were over twice as likely to develop high blood pressure (**Hypertension**).

**FLORIDA:** A new report from the Department of Health showed an increase in reported COVID-19 cases in recent weeks. The state had 18,518 reported new cases during the week that started Aug. 11 and 18,556 new cases during the week that started Aug. 4 — the highest totals in at least 10 weeks. The increase is nowhere near the numbers of the past two years during the pandemic. Scientists say COVID is in an endemic phase (**Health News Florida**).

<b><u>COVID-19, 08/25/2023</u></b>
Global Cases – Deaths 769,806,130 – 6,955,497
U.S. Hospitalizations – Deaths 6,256,971 – 1,138,602
SHOTS Global – U.S. SHOTS 13.5 billion – 152.5 million
CDC & WHO

## **Who Catches What? It's in Your Genes**

A recently published study shows that people who carry a common change to genes that code for certain immune system molecules which sit on the surface of certain cells – human leukocyte antigens – were more likely to have Covid-19 without any symptoms.

HLAs were previously used to determine whether organs are transportable. They are now used to determine whether organs are transplantable.

Another study, posted online, found that individuals with certain changes to genes near FOXP4, which codes for a protein active in the lungs and immune system, appear more likely to develop long Covid.

*CNN 07/26/2023*

## **They Ganged Up on An App And Got a Grant**

Two unaffiliated Grand Rapids, Michigan SNFs partnered on a state staffing grant application that has netted them \$3.5 million to help address workforce needs.

Holland Home and Edison Christian Health Center submitted a combined application to the state for a grant specifically targeting workforce shortages in skilled nursing facilities.

Despite the facilities operating differences, they'll be working collaboratively on worker retention and recruitment efforts that showcase the value caregivers bring to their communities.

This is not the largest grant given out, but it may be the most unique. In all, Michigan awarded \$67 million to six long-term care organizations.

*McKnight's, 08/22/2023*

## **Wildfires Displacing Canadian Nursing Home Residents**

Nearly 900 seniors have been forced out of care facilities in a wildfire-ravaged region of British Columbia while the province has joined Alberta in receiving

medical evacuees from the Northwest Territories.

the Ministry of Health in Alberta, said 54 residents from the Northwest Territories have arrived in the province, which is also preparing to support between 150 and 200 homecare clients.

A separate group of patients of various ages has also been moved. The majority of seniors were transferred to safer areas of the region but some are now in Vancouver, about 240 miles away.

*The Campbell River Mirror, 08/23/2023*

## **ProMedica Withering On The Skilled Nursing Vine**

ProMedica has continued to offload nearly all of its nursing homes while also securing an extension on a loan payoff on \$453 million in privately held debt.

The quarterly disclosure for the Toledo, OH-headquartered company shows the company retains just two skilled nursing facilities – a wholly-owned facility in Florida and a jointly operated building in Ohio. Combined the facilities have 213 beds.

This is down from more than 400 senior care facilities that served 200,000 patients and residents five years ago when ProMedica acquired HCR ManorCare, then the nation's second-largest provider of post-acute services and long-term care.

*McKnight's, 08/23/2023*

## **Staffing Lawsuits Seek Money Back for Residents**

It's a unique tactic. The lawsuits allege owner Terry Forcht and companies that manage two of his Kentucky nursing homes violated laws that require sufficient nurse staffing levels.

Attorneys for residents and former residents are seeking reimbursement for "services not provided" by accessing publicly available cost report and PBJ data.

Experts note, however, that mixing those data creates "bogus" data because the two pieces of information are "foundationally different."

*McKnight's, 08/23/2023*

## **ONE COLUMN**

### **Lowers Worker Claims/Costs Leaner Risk Mgt. Approach**

Nearly 200 nursing homes in Missouri saw their liability costs drop when they largely cut out the middleman to get help to injured employees more quickly.

Health Care Facilities of Missouri, which manages 176 nursing homes, said it saw a 28% decrease in claims, a 59% decrease in lost time, a 35% decrease in medical costs, a 56% decrease in indemnity costs, and a 69% decrease in the total cost of claims between 2020 to 2022.

The organization made those gains after hiring a new partner that offered a rather basic path to success: two new phone lines.

The first was an 800 reporting number, which eliminated the need for staff to mail or fax potential claims with every potential workers' compensation incident. The call-in option created less work for supervisors and also meant paying less money for adjusters to review each claim.

Instead, the new claims partner handled the determination process.

That partner, a California-based claims management company licensed across the US, also instituted a nurse triage line available to injured staff around the clock. It reduced about half the claims to first aid or self-care, rather than sending everyone for outside care for minor issues.

And the added resource resonated with both staff, who were reassured by quick consultations, and their supervisors, according to Scott Gilmore, vice president and co-owner of Carpenter and Company, the administrator for HCFM.

Gilmore added that the faster, more anticipatory system is also likely heading off future problems.

He outlined the plan's success in an article published in *Risk & Insurance* that noted the partnership's selection as an industry award-winner.

*McKnight's, 08/11/2023  
Risk & Insurance, 08/10/2023*

## **The New MDS Has Arrived With Even More Changes**

CMS released the final version of the new RAI manual Thursday to all but complete the biggest revamp of the MDS assessment tool in recent years.

In this final version, about 60 changes were made to the draft document CMS first issued in April.

Preparation and training is the key. Leah Klusch of the Alliance Training Center emphasized that the coming period will be one of intense training and crossover activities.

She suggests MDS managers get with operations and clinical management to “make sure everybody understands what they need to do.”

*McKnight's, 08/25/2023*

## **W.Va. Antes Up \$1 Million For Its Veterans Home**

Gov. Jim Justice signed a bill that will provide \$1 million to help the West Virginia Veterans home.

Representatives at the West Virginia Veterans Nursing Facility in Clarksburg said the \$1 million state appropriation would help provide much-needed resources like long-term care beds for the entire facility. The beds currently in use have been there for 16 years.

Administrator Sherri Reed said the beds will be more comfortable for the veterans and will be safer as well, for both resident and staff.

The funds are surplus appropriations approved during this month's legislative special session.

*Metro News, 08/17/2023*

## **New Hampshire: Goal: Make Nursing Homes a Last Resort**

One-third of New Hampshire's population will be over 65 by 2030. But services haven't kept up. There's not enough people to take care of those who are aging and not enough money.

This past legislature passed laws to lay the groundwork for a more coordinated,

comprehensive “system of care” for older adults.

The goal is to ensure there's a full range of care options. A top official said New Hampshire is at the beginning of what will be a long-term process of transforming how it supports older adults.

*New Hampshire Public Radio, 08/22/2023*

## **Strike Likely at 11 SNFs With History of Union Trouble**

Workers at 11 Chicago-area nursing homes on Thursday gave notice that they plan to strike in 10 days, following a breakdown in talks over staffing and wages.

The Labor Day strike would affect a group of nursing homes operated by Infinity Healthcare Management and owners Michael Blisko and Gubin Enterprises.

Union officials have accused the company of intentionally staffing buildings below required state levels and continuing to pay “many” staff members minimum wage.

*McKnight's, 08/25/2023*

## **More Injury Claims Not Necessarily Bad**

Long-term care facilities that created a favorable work environment actually drew more worker's injury claims than their peers. But that's not necessarily bad.

In a study of 25 nursing homes in Alberta Canada researchers reviewed nearly 3,500 workers' compensation claims to understand their association with a building's staff, organizational and resident characteristics and severe injury to workers.

Facilities with the most favorable work environment also had the highest frequency of claims, “somewhat counterintuitively,” as the researchers noted.

The report from the university of Alberta College of Health Sciences said underreporting can lead to further injury and a reduced workforce.

*Human Resources for Health, 08/16/2023*

## **Briefly IN THE NEWS**

In a July poll, two-thirds of those surveyed said either they or a family member have been addicted to alcohol or drugs, been homeless because of an addiction, or overdosed or died from drug use. Moreover, 19% say they themselves have been addicted to drugs or alcohol, had a drug overdose or were homeless because of an addiction. Addiction has been seen in 42% of people in rural areas and 33% of white adults (**KFF**).

The Kansas City, Missouri, Fire Department was called to help evacuate more than 117 people from the Parkview Healthcare Skilled Nursing Facility, after the facility's air conditioning failed in extreme heat last week. There were no serious injuries (**KMBC-TV**).

New research found that cardiorespiratory fitness -- the ability to do aerobic exercise in Swedish soldiers was associated with up to 42% lower risk of nine cancers later in life., The reductions included head and neck (20%), esophagus (39%), stomach (21%), pancreas (12%), liver (40%), colon (18%), kidney (20%) and lung (42%). Oddly, it also added risk for two kinds of cancers -- prostate and skin -- which scientists attribute to prostate cancer screening and more time in the sun while exercising (**British Journal of Sports Medicine**).

Having any kind of pain a year after a heart attack upped the chances of death in a eight-year study in Sweden. While patients with moderate pain were 35% more likely than those with no pain to die from any cause during the study, those with extreme pain were more than twice as likely to die. (**Journal the American Heart Association**).

A 70-year-old man died Aug. 15 after exiting a moving ambulance on a Florida interstate, according to local authorities. The ambulance was traveling through Port St. Lucie to a hospital in South Florida when the patient exited the vehicle's rear doors, fell onto the interstate and was struck by several vehicles. He died at the scene. A 29-year-old paramedic also fell from the ambulance and was critically injured (**WFTV-TV**).