

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT:

"At this point, COVID-19 can be described as endemic throughout the world," Aron Hall, the deputy director for science at the CDC's coronavirus and other respiratory viruses division

"The middle class is basically looking at a modest nest egg that will be completely wiped out by long-term care costs, and there's nothing protecting them at present time" former US Congressman Earl Pomeroy (D-ND)

"We're kind of in the midst of a rapid run of COVID cases throughout Indian Country" Dean Seneca founder and CEO of Seneca Scientific Solutions+, a public health and urban and regional planning company

"Our state has more seniors than schoolchildren" Erin Huppert, vice president of advocacy for LeadingAge Minnesota

SNF Lawsuit: Water Company Has "gone nuclear"

The owners of two nursing homes in Kansas City, MO, have filed a lawsuit against the city's water utility, which is threatening to shut off the water to the facilities, which house more than 260 residents.

The lawsuit seeks damages and an injunction that would remove a \$178,000 lien KC Water, placed on one of properties.

The dispute stems from the previous owners of the two facilities.

An attorney for the nursing homes, wrote in court documents that the utility hasn't explained bills and has "gone nuclear" in placing the \$178,000 lien against one of the facilities for delinquent payments.

Kansas City Star, 08/20/2024

Denying Certs Based On Quality of Pre-Owned SNFs

Center for Medicare Advocacy is urging federal regulators to use newly expanded nursing home ownership data to block owners associated with other poorly performing facilities from obtaining Medicare certification for new ventures.

In a recent report CMA said that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services should develop "explicit federal criteria" for facility ownership, including the certification needed to participate in Medicare and Medicaid programs.

The report focused on quality measures, ratings and penalties associated with the nation's 15 largest nursing home owners, which include nonprofit, privately held for-profits and private-equity backed organizations.

McKnight's, 08/18/2024

LNHA's License Suspended For Recent COVID Decisions

The Rhode Island Department of Health has suspended the license of Kristine Pacheco, former administrator at Pawtucket Falls Healthcare for "gross unprofessional conduct" for her decisions during a COVID-19 outbreak.

On July 31, 2024 an employee tested positive and was instructed by the facility's Infection Control Preventionist go home and not return for seven days.

RIDOH said Pacheco's directed the employee to return to work cooking in the kitchen on August 3 and 4 prior to the end of her required seven-day COVID-19 isolation period.

On August 8, 2024, 13 residents of the nursing home tested positive for COVID-19.

GoLocalProv, 08/17/2024

Need is High, But CNA Funds Are Lacking

Long-term care in New Hampshire is in dire need of more CNAs as staff shortages limit the number of available beds. But a key recruitment and training program has been on hold since May, after its funding dried up.

New Hampshire Needs Caregivers, helped people who want to become CNAs pay for the training, connect with potential employers and navigate the process of starting their new career.

A bill in the legislature initially included funding to keep the program going, but that was stripped out of the final legislation.

Last hope is a grant of federal funds from the Governor.

New Hampshire Public Radio, 08/16/2024

200K Minn. LTC Workers To Receive \$1000 Bonuses

Over 200,000 long-term care workers in Minnesota may qualify for \$1,000 bonuses as part of an initiative to help address the state's nursing shortage.

However, some long-time care advocacy organization believes the new money falls well short of meeting the long-term needs of providers in addressing their staffing needs.

With \$84 million in funding approved in 2023, the Minnesota Care Force Incentive will support direct care professionals who provide care to long-term care patients, people with disabilities and children with autism.

Under the funding plan, eligible employers can apply for the additional bonuses on behalf of their employees.

McKnight's, 08/19/2024

LTC Cost Rated #1 Concern of Older Adults

Researchers asked 2,576 adults ages 50 to 101 to rank 26 health-related issues, such as prescription drug costs, long-term care costs, social isolation and loneliness, and access to quality care.

The costs of long-term care – nursing homes, assisted living facilities and home care – was the top concern, rated very concerning among 56.3% of participants.

Access to "quality" long-term care also was a concern but ranked seventh on the list of overall worries.

JAMA, 08/14/2024

IN THE TRENCHES – COVID-19 & Other Outbreaks in the States, the SNFs, the World

AMERICA: Nationally, wastewater detections of SARS-CoV-2 last week were at the very high level for the second straight week. The highest levels are still in the West and South. The KP.3.1.1 variant now makes up 36.8% of sequences, up from 22.8% in the previous 2 weeks. Test positivity rose slightly last week to 18.1% nationally; emergency department visits for COVID declined a bit (*CIDRAP*).

WASHINGTON, D.C.: New data from Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals show that rates of antibiotic prescribing substantially declined after the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the pandemic globally 65% to 80% received antibiotics. Antibiotic use was 30% higher in COVID-19 patients than in uninfected people. Once concerns about bacterial coinfection declined, antibiotic use in COVID-19 patients, and all inpatients, subsequently fell (*Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*).

OHIO: Gov. Mike DeWine started experiencing mild cold-like symptoms and then tested positive for COVID-19 Tuesday morning. DeWine's doctor has reportedly prescribed Paxlovid to help in his recovery. The office said the governor plans to work from home for the rest of the week (*WJW-TV*).

AMERICA: A study that analyzed the clinical features of and outcomes of pediatric and adult hospitalized COVID patients at five US sites, found that teens were at greatest risk for severe disease among all children, and those 50 to 64 years old were at greatest risk among all adults. The study took place from March 2020 to March 2023 and included 1,560 hospitalized COVID-19 patients (*Open Forum Infectious Diseases*).

ITALY: A team led by University of Milan researchers conducted 2-year semi-structured interviews with 165 COVID-19 patients who had been monitored by a telemedicine operations center from February to May 2020. Of the 165 patients, 84% reported lingering symptoms 1 year after infection, while 61% still had them at 2 years. About half

(49%) of participants who had long-COVID symptoms at 2 years had reported them at 1 year, had received the COVID-19 vaccine, and hadn't been reinfected in the interval (*PLOS One*).

GENEVA: WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD announced a surge in mpox activity in African countries constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations. Tedros said mpox has been detected in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has already spread to neighboring countries (*WHO*).

WASHINGTON, D.C.: LeadingAge has suggested the COVID vaccine be put on an annual schedule similar to flu shots, but that the two vaccines remain separate. LeadingAge also wants a whole-of-system approach throughout the entire healthcare continuum to support all healthcare providers who are involved with seniors (*McKnight's*).

TEXAS: A team of researchers from the University of Houston have developed a new vaccine to treat and prevent the spread of flu and multiple coronavirus strains. Through two nasal sprays — an immune activating therapeutic treatment and a new vaccine — the team of UH researchers have not only broken ground on vaccinating against SARS-CoV-2 and the flu virus, but also on creating a universal coronavirus vaccine (*Houston Chronicle*).

WASHINGTON, D.C.: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced an additional \$35 million in emergency health assistance for the clade 1 mpox outbreak in Central and East Africa. USAID said the announcement brings the total help for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other affected countries to \$55 million. The new funding is pending congressional notification (*CIDRAP*).

THE WORLD: New data from a National Institutes of Health-funded study concludes that none of 25 routine clinical lab values can be reliably used to diagnose long COVID. The findings suggest that clinicians should continue to

focus on symptoms and symptom relief rather than relying solely on lab tests (*Annals of Internal Medicine*).

WASHINGTON state: The University of Washington will provide another round of COVID-19 vaccine pop-up clinics on the Seattle Campus on Oct. 25 and Nov. 1. Both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines will be available, including the updated omicron-specific bivalent boosters (*Univ. of Washington news release*).

THE WORLD: A study by Yale School of Medicine, Northeastern University, and Rice University has captured new views of the intricate molecular relationship between our cells and the COVID-19-causing virus, SARS-CoV-2. The study reveals how SARS-CoV-2 uses its pointy spike protein molecules to grab on to and drag itself to touch the surface of human cells and eventually deliver its viral genomes into cells (*Science*).

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AMERICA: COVID-19 infection during the first 21 weeks of pregnancy is associated with a slightly higher risk of gestational diabetes, according to an analysis of insurance claims by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) researchers. They found a modest but statistically significant higher relative risk (12%) of having a gestational diabetes claim for COVID at 23 weeks gestation or after (*Clinical Infectious Diseases*).

COVID-19, 08/23/2024

Global Cases – Deaths
775,867,547 – 7,057,145

U.S. Cases – Deaths
103,436,829 – 1,193,165

WHO

The New COVID-19 Vaccines Are on the Way

The FDA has approved updated Covid vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

The jabs target a strain called KP.2, a descendant of the highly contagious omicron subvariant JN.1 that began circulating widely in the U.S. earlier this year.

In June, the CDC recommended that everyone over 6 months old receive an updated COVID vaccine and flu jab this year.

Both Pfizer and Moderna will begin shipping its new shot immediately and expect it to be available in pharmacies, hospitals and clinics across the U.S. "beginning in the coming days."

CNBC, 08/22/2024

Maintaining Staff During an Ownership Change

A new Illinois law requires nursing homes to submit change of ownership plans that clearly delineate how the buyer will ensure consistent staffing throughout the transition.

A study often cited by CMS found that private equity ownership decreased hours of frontline nursing staffing by 3%, while a Health Affairs paper found that in the two to three years after a REIT took a stake in a nursing home, registered nurse staffing levels declined by as much as 6%.

Provider groups and investors around the country will be closely watching to see what affect the new law has.

McKnight's, 08/12/2024

Prior Auths, Denial Rates Continue Steady Climb

An analysis found that MA plans denied 3.4 million prior authorization requests in 2022 – about 7.4% of the 46.2 million requests submitted and a higher share of denials than the three previous years.

Prior authorization appeals were an effective — but underutilized — way for beneficiaries to have a denial overturned.

Just 1 in 10 prior authorization denials were appealed in 2022, but more than

83% of these appeals resulted in a denial being overturned.

Prior authorization requests were most common in Humana plans, CVS had the highest rate of denials.

KFF, 08/09/2024

Age/Sex Discrimination SNF Socked with \$150K Fine

The Laurels of Athens, a skilled nursing facility in Athens, OH, has been ordered to pay \$150,000 in response to charges of age and sex discrimination, and retaliation.

An EEOC lawsuit alleged that a 59-year-old physical therapy assistant lost his job after returning from medical leave, claiming he was terminated due to his age.

The Laurels of Athens fired him and claimed there was no work available even though it offered work to other younger, female physical therapy assistants.

The company also refused to rehire the employee after he filed a charge of discrimination.

EEOC news release, 08/20/2024

Nursing Home Fire Seven Residents Rescued

Firefighters extinguished a structure fire early Wednesday morning at a nursing home in Chicago's western suburbs.

Fire officials say emergency services were dispatched to Westmont Manor Nursing Home, a two-story building, in response to a fire alarm just after 4:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Firefighters immediately turned hoses on the second floor to knock down the main part of the fire, which was confined to one room.

Seven residents were rescued. Fire officials say the fire was contained to the room of origin, but there was heavy smoke on the second floor and 22 units in the facility are now uninhabitable.

WGN-TV, 08/21/2024

ONE COLUMN

Salary-wise Nursing Homes Holding Their Own vs CCRCs

While still under siege due to departures at top administrative levels, nursing homes nonetheless have seen the huge salary rises of the pandemic years continue to moderate, according to the largest yearly US nursing home survey.

Nursing home administrators' average salary was \$135,744 in 2024 after a tempered 3.8% annual rise, while directors of nursing hit \$117,754 due to a 3.75% climb. Their respective assistants saw pay rates rise slightly slower.

The nursing titles mentioned above rose between 4.59% and 5.12%, a far cry from the 9.4% to 11.5% range a year earlier. Meanwhile, DONs saw the rise in their average rise drop from 4.67% to 3.75%.

Chief financial officer (\$169,819), director of information technology (\$111,075), Controller (\$103,391) and director of therapy/Rehabilitation (\$103,230) were the other top-earner categories in the survey findings.

Registered nurses' average hourly pay rate rose to \$39.74, LPNs' to \$31.21 and CNAs' to \$19.81.

While CNAs at nursing homes and CCRCs registered the identical \$19.81 hourly wage, RNs, LPNs and assistant DONs all were paid higher at nursing homes.

Nursing home administrators in this year's survey results averaged a bonus that was 16% of their base salary. DONs' bonuses averaged 14.3% of their salary.

When it came to sign-on bonuses, that was another hot scene. DONs led with an average \$8,488 (up 14% from a year earlier), while RNs got an average of \$5,547, LPNs \$4,421 and CNAs \$2,491.

Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Services gathered results on nearly 101,000 long-term care employees from 914 facilities for the report. It covers 47 management and 55 non-management positions and was produced in cooperation with LeadingAge and with support from the American Health Care Association.

McKnight's, 08/18/2024

SNF Owes State \$1 Million Gets Ten Years to Pay Up

In May, the 46-bed Tabor Manor Care Center in Fremont County, Iowa filed for bankruptcy, listing \$1.3 million in assets and \$2.3 million in liabilities, including \$1,169,257 it owes in QAA fees it owes the state.

QAA fees are a mechanism the state uses to artificially inflate a SNF's cost of doing business allowing it to draw more from Medicaid. It more than offsets the fees paid to the state.

Now a payment plan with the state calls for that money to be paid back at 4.5% interest - \$10,930 a month for 10 ½ years.

Iowa Capital Dispatch, 08/20/2024

\$1M? 10 Years? Senator Says Time to Do Something

Iowa State Sen. Claire Celsi (D-West Des Moines) is urging action in response to reports about the ongoing unpaid fees by Iowa nursing homes.

Celsi, the ranking member of the Senate Oversight Committee, said Senate Democrats have repeatedly called for hearings to address the ongoing nursing home crisis, but said that Republicans have yet to take meaningful action.

As the situation develops, Celsi is urging her colleagues in the legislature to prioritize addressing the crisis in the upcoming session.

"Republicans have a chance next session to join with Senate Democrats and do the right thing," she said

KGAN-TV, 08/22/2024

Inpatient Hospice Becoming A Skilled Nursing Facility

Financial pressures and changes in the long-term care industry are leading one healthcare provider to make plans that might seem counterintuitive on one level but are reflective of a fresher trend on another. It's closing its hospice center and turning it into a skilled nursing facility.

While the nursing home sector is facing unprecedented challenges, MultiCare Health System in Washington is tying the future success of its 12-year-old hospice

building to its ability to fill beds with short-term rehab patients.

Some hospice services would still be available.

McKnight's, 08/21/2024

Workers May Strike Two Western N.Y. SNFs

Approximately 170 union workers at Williamsville Suburban and Safire of Northtowns, two Western New York nursing homes, are threatening to hit the picket line this week if they cannot reach a contract agreement.

A company spokesman said the union tried to throw a "experience-based pay" clause in the agreement at the last minute, leading to the issues.

1199SEIU has filed an unfair labor practices complaint against the owner.

If a deal is not met, the walkout is set to occur on Wednesday, Aug. 28. Workers will participate in the strike from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M.

WIVB-TV, 08/20/2024

A Quarter of For-Profit SNFs Not Meeting IP Requirements

Nearly 1 in 4 for-profit nursing homes may not be complying with federal requirements regarding the designation and training of an infection preventionist at their facilities.

HHS-OIG conducted an audit survey of 100 for-profit nursing homes nationwide to determine their compliance with federal requirements for infection preventionists.

They found that 17 of those facilities did not meet the requirement that the IP complete specialized infection prevention and control training prior to assuming the role and seven did not comply with the requirement to designate an IP.

From that sample OIG estimates 2568 facilities are out of compliance.

McKnight's, 08/21/2024

Briefly in the News

Maria Branyas, the world's oldest person, passed away in a Spanish nursing home Tuesday at the age of 117. Guinness World Records also issued a statement confirming that she passed away at the age of 117 years and 168 days. She was born in 1907 when Teddy Roosevelt was the American President (***YouTube***).

The founder and CEO of The Courvilles Communities, four assisted living and retirement homes, and his wife were two of the three people killed in a three-car accident last weekend in New Hampshire. Richard Courville, 77, and his wife Denise, 65, were killed when a pickup truck struck another car then veered across the median and hit their car head-on. Richard Courville had been in the nursing home business for more than 50 years. The Courville Communities is New Hampshire's largest private senior living services company (***Ink Link***).

While Steward Health Care System was losing hundreds of millions of dollars a year, the company paid CEO Ralph de la Torre, MD, at least \$250 million over 4 years. Eventually, de la Torre came under scrutiny over his reportedly lavish lifestyle, including a \$40 million, 190-foot yacht, a \$15 million, 90-foot sport-fishing boat and a \$7.2 million, 500-acre ranch in Texas. A Senate committee has launched an investigation into de la Torre and subpoenaed him to testify next month (***The Wall Street Journal***).

Among US children born in the past 30 years, childhood vaccines have prevented an estimated 508 million cases of illness, 32 million hospitalizations, and 1.1 million deaths, resulting in direct savings of \$540 billion and societal savings of \$2.7 trillion (***Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report***).

The CMS building in Baltimore, Maryland had been closed since early June when Legionella bacteria was discovered in the water supply. It reopened this month. The Social Security Administration building, also in Baltimore, two-and-a-half miles away, has turned off about 20 water fixtures because it too discovered higher than normal levels of the bacteria in its water supplies (***Federal News Network***).