

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

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THEY SAID IT:

"It's not hyperbole to say access to care is a national crisis" Mark Parkinson, president and CEO of AHCA/NCAL

"I've learned that 'look good, feel good' rings true in the post-acute care space, Derick Apt, CFO PACS

"This comprehensive and historic legislation represents a profound commitment to the well-being of our seniors and the dedicated professionals who care for them, and it will have a lasting impact on the provision of care in Massachusetts"

Tara Gregorio, president of the Massachusetts Senior Care Association on LTC reform legislation sent to the Governor

Virginia SNF Reopens a Year After Devastating Fire

In the early morning hours of Aug. 11, 2023, an electrical fire forced the evacuation of 135 residents of South Boston Health & Rehab in Virginia.

Smoke from the blaze in the electrical room adjacent to the kitchen quickly spread throughout the nursing home.

At the time, South Boston Fire Chief Steve Phillips estimated damage to the building caused by the fire as a "multi-million-dollar loss."

Now, over a year later, after a complete renovation, South Boston has reopened.

First admissions priority was given to former residents who were relocated to other nursing homes during the renovation

Most are returning.

The Gazette-Virginian, 09/02/2024

Study: Thousands of SNFs Without Medical Director

A study by researchers from the Long Term Care Community Care Coalition has concluded that More than one-third of US nursing homes did not have a medical director onsite during the first quarter of 2023.

Researchers used PBJ data from the first quarter of 2017 through the end of the first quarter in 2023 to determine that 36.1% of nursing homes "reported zero medical director presence" from Jan. through April 2023.

The medical director, when one was reported, was on payroll for an average 36 minutes per day - 4.2 hours per week ,or less than 1 minute PPD.

McKnight's, 09/03/2024

..... But Others Say 'We Ain't Buying It'

"PBJ is a flawed system," said Rajeev Kumar, MD, president of PALTmed after a report found that, using PBJ data, 36.1% of nursing homes have no medical director.

"I would be appalled if that were the case," he said. "It would be really, really alarming if that were to be true."

He noted the physicians perform two different types of work for nursing homes: clinical – treating residents and the administrative role of medical director.

"That administrative work may not be fully accounted for in the payroll journal data."

Both side say this could merely be a reporting problem.

McKnight's, 09/03/2024

Some Say They Do – This One Says They Don't

Previous studies have suggested an increased risk of falls and related injuries (FRI) associated with antidepressant use.

But now a study of 101953 eligible beneficiaries found that first-line antidepressants were associated with a decreased FRI risk in older adults with depression compared with no treatment.

Compared with the untreated group, psychotherapy use was not associated with FRI risk while other first-line antidepressants were associated with a decreased FRI risk

The FRI incidence ranged from 63 per 1000 person-year for those treated with bupropion to 87 per 1000 person-year for those who were untreated.

JAMA Network Open, 08/26/2024

A Grim Snapshot Of Nursing Home Trends

Since 2020, at least 774 nursing homes have closed, displacing 28,421 residents. There are also 62,567 fewer nursing home beds than there were in 2020.

A report from AHCA/NCAL notes that "Nursing homes are closing at a rate much faster than they are opening."

Nationwide, only 37 new facilities opened last year, compared to 73 in 2020, 71 in 2021, and 55 in 2022. Eight months into 2024, and just seven new facilities have opened.

Among closed facilities, the average bed size was 77, while 69% were located in urban areas. More than 62% of affected residents were Medicaid beneficiaries.

AHCA/NCAL news release, 08/19/2024

All It takes is Money To Recruit STNAs

The Arizona Health Care Association created a workforce development program that was not only successful but blew past its goal by nearly 50%, recruiting and training more than 2,000 certified nursing assistants and long-term care caregivers.

The association received a one-time grant of \$6.5 million in America Rescue Plan dollars from the Governor's office.

By partnering with 159 long-term care providers and 25 healthcare educational partners the association recruited 2,217 students.

What's even more impressive, some 89%, or nearly 2,000, stayed on the job after completing initial training.

McKnight's, 09/03/2024

IN THE TRENCHES – COVID-19 & Other Outbreaks in the U.S. and the World

AMERICA: Hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID have trended up. But unlike infections, these rates are nowhere near those seen in winter surges, or in summers past. More than 2,000 people died of COVID in July — a high number but a small fraction of the at least 25,700 COVID deaths in July 2020 (*KFF News*).

NEW YORK: Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo will testify publicly before Congress September 10 about his controversial advisory from the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, that required nursing homes to admit people infected with COVID-19. Cuomo testified in June behind closed doors before the House Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic, the same panel he will appear before next week (*CNN*).

AMERICA: Health experts are urging school staff and families to take active steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 amid rising infections as school districts stick to their previous plans to combat the virus similarly to how they would the flu or strep throat. Weekly deaths from COVID-19 have steadily risen and wastewater viral activity for the disease, monitored as a means of detecting where a potential outbreak may occur, has gradually climbed since May (*genesis.com*).

ENGLAND: A study of nearly 19 million adults in England by University of Bristol researchers reveals a higher rate of mental illness among survivors of COVID-19 hospitalization, particularly among the unvaccinated. The most common mental illness diagnosis was depression. The incidence of depression in the first 4 weeks post-diagnosis and week 5 through 28 for serious mental illness in all periods was higher in participants aged 60+ than in their younger counterparts (*JAMA Psychiatry*).

MINNASOTA: A measles outbreak in the Twin Cities metropolitan area has sickened 30 unvaccinated children. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) yesterday said the outbreak is mainly affecting unvaccinated children in the state's Somali community. Though the outbreak is centered in a specific population, anyone who is unvaccinated is

at risk for illness with the highly contagious virus (*CIDRAP*).

FRANCE: French researchers mined data from the French National Health Data System on 4,635 French citizens aged 12 to 49 years hospitalized for myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle. The study suggests previously healthy young men have considerably fewer cardiovascular sequelae by 18 months if they develop myocarditis after COVID-19 mRNA vaccination than after COVID-19 infection (*JAMA*).

MASSACHUSETTS: Officials announced plans to start spraying for mosquitoes in two counties to reduce the risk from eastern equine encephalitis, a rare but serious mosquito-borne illness that can lead to severe neurologic complications and potentially death (*CIDRAP*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: HHS has launched a new national campaign to inform the public about common respiratory viruses and available vaccines. The campaign, called *Risk Less. Do More*, aims to increase awareness of vaccines that reduce serious illness from influenza (flu), COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in high-risk populations and to limit the spread of these viruses among all Americans (*HHS news release*).

MICHIGAN: Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus has been confirmed in a dairy herd in Van Buren County, the nation's first detection in almost 2 weeks. There are now 28 affected dairy herds in Michigan. According to state rules, the detection will now prohibit the exhibition of all lactating dairy cattle, and those in the last 2 months of pregnancy, until there are no new cases of HPAI in Michigan dairy cattle for at least 60 consecutive days (*KFF*).

GEORGIA & OREGON: The Georgia Department of Public Health reported a measles infection in an Atlanta resident who wasn't fully vaccinated, marking the state's fifth case of the year. Also, the Oregon Health Authority reported 4 more measles cases in its outbreak, raising the

total to 30 in three counties. The outbreak is the state's largest since 1991 (*CDC*).

CAMBODIA: The health ministry reported another human H5N1 avian flu case, the country's tenth of the year. The patient was a 15-year-old girl who died from her infection on August 20. An investigation found that chickens had died in the village 5 days before the girl became ill and that she had touched and held dead chickens (*Avian Flu Diary*).

THE WORLD: The protective effect of established COVID-19 vaccines but wanes relatively quickly requiring booster shots...But an innovative vector vaccine developed at the Helmholtz Center for Infection Research elicits prolonged immune response in animals and maintains its efficacy over extended time. It is also conceivable to use to produce combination vaccines that provide immunity against various diseases all at once - COVID-19 and influenza, for example (*Frontiers in Immunology*).

THE WORLD: An adjuvant is an immune-boosting agent added to vaccines. The MF59-adjuvanted trivalent influenza vaccine (aTIV) and the high-dose trivalent influenza vaccine (HD-TIV) are both designed for adults age 65 and older, who are at serious risk from serious flu complications. Now a study has indicated the lower dose MF59 is more effected against the flu than the high dose vaccine (*Open Forum Infectious Diseases*).

CALIFORNIA: With COVID remaining at stubbornly high levels, some doctors are warning that transmission could again accelerate following the busy Labor Day holiday weekend — potentially prolonging a summer wave that has already proved more intense and enduring than some experts had anticipated (*Los Angeles Times*).

COVID-19, 09/06/2024

Global Cases – Deaths
776,007,137 – 7,059,612

U.S. Deaths
1,195,262

WHO

Weight-loss Drug Tied To Lower Risk OF COVID Death

The anti-obesity drug *semaglutide* may lower the risk of death from COVID-19, cardiovascular disease, and all causes.

Researchers randomly assigned 17,604 participants aged 45+ who were overweight/obese and had cardiovascular disease but not diabetes to receive a weekly injection of semaglutide or a placebo.

Participants in the *semaglutide* group had lower rates of death (19% reduction), CV death (15%), and non-CV death (23%) than placebo recipients.

A total of 24.2% of participants tested positive for COVID-19. Semaglutide wasn't linked to a lower rate of COVID-19 infection, but fewer infected participants who received semaglutide had COVID-related serious adverse events or died.

Journal of the American College of Cardiology, 08/29/2024

Ownership Changes May Depress Care and Staffing

Investigators from the University of Pennsylvania and the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Philadelphia using 5-Star ratings studied ownership changes in nearly 3600 nursing homes between 2016-2022.

They concluded changes in ownership may have a small, statistically significant negative impact on staffing levels and the overall quality of care.

Researchers found a slight decrease of nearly 0.1-point in the overall quality ratings on the 5-Star scale, primarily driven by a 0.2-point decline in staffing and a 0.07-point decrease in health inspections.

The decline was offset somewhat by a 0.15-point increase in certain quality measures.

*Journal of the American Geriatrics Society
September 2024*

Florida Veterans Homes Need More Funds

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs is asking the state Legislature for \$3.5 million to cover extra food and

contractor costs at its nursing homes through July 2025.

This year, the eight state-run nursing homes and an assisted living facility received \$29.5 million to pay for contracted services and \$4.3 million to buy food.

But the department says its homes have increased by 26% over last year and are nearing capacity.

In June, Gov. Ron DeSantis approved a bill allowing spouses and widows of veterans to live in state-run nursing homes.

Florida Phoenix, 09/03/2024

U.S. Court Hands Nursing Home a Labor Victory

A federal appeals court has ruled a Michigan nursing home, Fountain Bleu Health and Rehabilitation Center, did not violate federal law by not bargaining with unionized employees when it increased hourly pay during the pandemic and hired non-union workers.

The appeals court said the NLRB was wrong to order the facility to bargain with union employees over a \$2 per hour pay increase during the pandemic while staff were caring for COVID-positive residents.

McKnight's, 09/02/2024

CCRC in Receivership Bailed Out by Donors

No longer to meet its obligation to bondholders from its 2013 construction, Casey's Pond Senior Living Community, Steamboat Springs, CO entered receivership July 1. The COVID-19 pandemic and its significant wage and expense escalation left the CCRC in significant financial straits.

With interest and fees, the \$44 million in bonds had swelled to a \$68 million unpayable debt.

But the city kicked in \$2.5 million and a "quiet" fundraising campaign raised million more from local donors.

Another nonprofit, Northwest Colorado Health, will become the new owner of the CCRC.

Senior Living, 08/28/2024

ONE COLUMN

Mass. Landmark LTC Reform Bill Sent to Governor

Sweeping reforms to Massachusetts' long-term care industry that would raise providers' rates while enacting stricter disclosure requirements on facility sales has been sent to Gov. Maura Haley.

The legislation creates a Long-Term Care Workforce and Capital Fund that would be administered through the state Secretary of Health and Human Services to provide funds for capital loans and also for workforce training programs.

The money for the fund will come from a variety of federal and state sources, including half of any amounts the state collects through fines to facilities in which residents are found with bodily injuries or have been sexually assaulted.

At a time when lawmakers nationwide are pressing aggressive consumer-driven reforms, the Massachusetts package is notable because it was designed to offer a combination of measures designed to improve quality and increase the resources available to providers.

Funds for the training programs for CNAs, a CNA-to-LPN pathway, and supervisory training for clinicians can be used for program costs, tuition, books, exam and licensing fees, stipends for enrollees, childcare, and transportation.

The legislation also calls for Medicaid rates for SNFs to be set using a base rate not more than two years prior to the current rate year. Medicaid also will have to establish a series of rate add-ons for one-on-one staffing for at-risk residents who require 24-hour monitoring and supervision. About 70% of the state's more than 33,000 nursing facility residents receive state-funded care.

The legislation creates more guardrails for facility ownership transfers, requiring the Department of Public Health to review financial and legal information from potential new owners and management companies before granting operating licenses.

The bill's text reads "The examination shall aggregate information collected on multiple skilled nursing facilities that are owned and operated by a single owner."

McKnight's, 08/29/2024

SNFs Pay a Heavy Price For Ultra-Tubby Residents

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine have found caring for residents with severe obesity – those with a body mass index of 40 or higher – contributes to higher costs for nursing homes including increased staffing and specialized equipment.

Further, current reimbursement models are inadequate to cover the increased costs.

Regardless of the number of additional staff required, there was consensus across participants from all groups that, for large, non-ambulatory and relatively immobile residents, assistance with ADLs, such as transfers, transportation, and daily evaluations, required more staff than a typical resident.

McKnight's, 09/04/2024

Residents Finally to Be Included in Clinical Trials

Even though clinical trials are critical to the development and testing of medical therapies and treatments including drugs, nursing home residents are rarely included in clinical research studies.

But now a team led by researchers from the Indiana University School of Medicine and Regenstrief Institute has received funding expected to total \$15.5 million from the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Aging to establish a national network structure to include more nursing home residents in clinical trials.

The new five-year award will fund the development of an innovative national nursing home clinical trials network called NEXT STEPs.

NIH news release, 8/29/2024

SNF Owner Says Payroll Company Miscalculated OT

The Department of Labor said during the week it recovered \$375,649 in back wages and liquidated damages for 806 current and former employees of Rochester-based Hurlbut Health

Consulting who were "denied ... overtime pay in violation of federal law."

Owner of multiple SNFs Robert Hurlbut isn't disputing the back pay but says a payroll company he contracted with miscalculated the amounts owed to employees for shift differentials and overtime hours.

"They're making it sound like we did this on purpose, and we didn't," he said. "We didn't fail in anything."

He declined to name the payroll company.

McKnight's, 09/05/2024

Shadow of COVID Lingers For Pittsburgh-area CCRC

The Masonic Village of Sewickley, a CCRC, is struggling to fill nursing home beds and personal care apartments after the virus pandemic decimated census counts.

Since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, skilled nursing unit has mothballed nearly half of its licensed beds, cutting the total to 68 from 128 beds at its Sturgeon Health Center and has filled just 37 of its 62 apartments in the Star Points Personal Care Home, both located on the Sewickley campus.

Pennsylvania's five Masonic Villages have lost \$11.3 million in the first six months of 2024.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 08/23/2024

Telehealth Mindfulness Used to Ease Chronic Pain

A recent multisite randomized clinical trial appears to offer hope for people with chronic pain, including many older adults.

The study, including 811 veterans, tested two mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) conducted via telehealth against usual care for managing chronic pain and certain comorbid conditions for one year.

While the improvements were described as modest, the study suggests that mindfulness-based approaches delivered via telehealth could be a valuable addition to pain management strategies, potentially benefiting older adults and others struggling with chronic pain.

JAMA Internal Medicine, 08/16/2024

Briefly in the News

For the fourth time in six years, the president of New York's largest health-care union, George Gresham of 1199SEIU, has won the top spot on the "Labor Power 100" list from *City & State* magazine (*Empire Center*).

Attorneys representing both living and deceased patients of an Oregon hospital filed a \$303 million lawsuit against the facility after a nurse was accused of replacing prescribed fentanyl with nonsterile tap water in intravenous drips. The wrongful death and medical malpractice complaint accuses Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center in Medford of negligence. The suit says the hospital failed to monitor medication administration procedures and prevent drug diversion by their employees, among other claims (*Rogue Valley Times*).

The American Academy of Physician Associates is calling out the American Medical Association for allegedly spreading misinformation and making disparaging remarks about the profession. In a letter to the AMA dated Tuesday and made public, the trade group said the AMA has not responded to its request to meet to discuss "the impact of AMA's disparaging rhetoric targeted at the physician associate professor" (*Modern Healthcare*).

The Ensign Group has acquired seven nursing homes in Colorado and one in Kansas with a total of 862 beds. The transactions bring Ensign's total to 323 healthcare operations in 14 states (*Senior Living*).

When should you take blood pressure medicine? Researchers at the University of Alberta in Canada found that it doesn't seem to matter. In two trials, one in frail elderly patients – average age 88 – evening administration of blood pressure-lowering medications had no clinical benefits over morning administration. (*European Society of Cardiology*).