

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

Edited by Drew Vogel

drewvogel5255@msn.com

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THEY SAID IT

"Leadership development in this field [administrators] requires a structured 'career ladder' approach, similar to what we see in nursing" Natasha Mason, director of strategic initiatives at Care Providers of Oklahoma's Elevate: Excellence in Nursing Home & Long-Term Care Administration

"It's unconscionable that more than four years since this began, we still don't have one FDA-approved drug" Meighan Stone, executive director of the Long COVID Campaign

"Cuts to Medicaid of this magnitude are going to jack up the cost of health insurance, shutter nursing homes and deprive seniors and Americans with disabilities of home-based care. ... Mr. Kennedy has virtually no knowledge or experience in handling these issues" Sen. Ron Wyden at opening of RFK, Jr.'s confirmation hearing to be HHS Secretary

Death From Legionnaire's In Vermont Nursing Home

The Vermont Department of Health said one of six residents has died from the Legionnaires' disease at Cedar Hill Continuing Care Community in Windsor.

The facility has brought in an out-of-state water management expert, IWC Innovations, to provide additional tests to their water and enhance protocols.

Residents at the facility are drinking bottled water. Showers have been limited unless the shower has a filter in place.

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WPTZ-TV, 01/29/2025

Kennedy Blasted Before He Got to Speak at His Hearing

Just ten minutes into Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s Senate hearing Sen. Ron Wyden, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee warned that Medicaid cuts managed by an inexperienced leader at the HHS would have devastating consequences, including shuttering nursing homes.

Wyden also noted that Kennedy, as head of HHS and CMS would make recommendations that "determine which vaccines senior citizens get for free through Medicare."

Chairman Mike Crapo (R-ID) blasted Wyden's remarks as an attack before introducing Kennedy and allowing to make an opening argument for his nomination.

McKnight's, 01/29/2025

Concerns Emerge as Feds Pause Health Comms

Federal health agencies, including CMS, have halted almost all external communication and cancelled several critical public health meetings as part of the presidential transition.

Initially, observers had little information on how long the pause would last, but NBC News reported that an HHS memo cited Feb. 1 as the end of a review period.

But fears about the extent of the blackout weren't totally allayed as news of additional health policy changes continued to emerge.

A report indicated several important health or scientific meetings had been cancelled including a planned Feb. 20-21 meeting of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee.

McKnight's, 01/23/2025

HHS Among 18 Inspectors General Bounced by Trump

President Trump fired at least 18 inspectors general, including those in the Department, Health and Human Services, Defense Department, State Department and the Department of Labor.

Following the purge multiple lawmakers — on both sides of the aisle — pointed out that Trump's move appeared to violate the law, which requires presidents to give Congress a 30-day notice and substantive reasoning before an inspector general is removed from their post.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said that he'd "like further explanation from President Trump" about his justification for the firings.

NBC News, 01/28/2024

Change Data Attack Much Larger Than First Reported

The ransomware attack against Change Healthcare last year exposed data on a record-breaking 190 million people. That's 90 million more people than UnitedHealth Group, the company, which operates Change Healthcare through its Optum subsidiary, disclosed to federal regulators in October. It also amounts to 55% of the U.S. population.

A cyberattack against Anthem (now Elevance Health) in 2015, which affected nearly 80 million people, was the previous record holder in the healthcare sector.

Modern Healthcare, 01/27/2025

VA Declares 300K Health Care Jobs 'Trump-Proof'

More than 300,000 VA health care jobs are exempt from a federal hiring freeze instituted Jan. 20 by President Donald Trump.

Acting Veterans Affairs Secretary Todd Hunter issued a memo Jan. 21 containing instructions for the department to comply with Trump's executive order, issued shortly after he was sworn into office.

Trump's order did not list any exemptions, but in his memo, Hunter said positions critical to delivering health care to veterans were an exception, and those considered essential for providing benefits like disability compensation could be considered protected if deemed necessary by the federal Office of Personnel Management.

Military.com, 01/23/2025

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

AMERICA: Using current estimates of US long-COVID burden (assuming the probability of long COVID is 6% and symptoms last 1 year), cases cost an average of \$2.01 billion annually. The economic burden of long COVID already surpasses that of carpal tunnel, Lyme disease, and psoriasis and is likely to continue to grow. Long COVID could end up costing US society \$2.01 billion to \$6.56 billion, employers at least \$1.99 billion to \$6.49 billion, and third-party payers \$21.0 million to 68.5 million annually (*CIDRAP*).

AMERICA: A new study finds just over 11% of American seniors on Medicaid lost their coverage during a post-COVID unwinding, when many states kicked into high gear efforts to reduce their rolls. Now, former CMS administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure is warning that the next administration must continue efforts to keep reenrollment simple to prevent “eligible people from falling through the cracks.” Far and away, Medicaid is the biggest payer of skilled nursing care in the US (*McKnight’s*).

THE WORLD: Although health care professionals know a lot more about COVID-19 than they did at the start of the pandemic in 2020, there are still many lingering questions regarding its effect on the human body. But predicting the severity of COVID-19 infection may be improved through leukocyte, also known as white blood cell count. About 70% of COVID-19 patients developed cognitive impairment after infection. The risk of cognitive impairment is significantly increased among older adults, especially women (*Menopause*).

AMERICA: A large VA study of nonhospitalized veterans, during the 2022 to 2023 season, shows having COVID-19 was associated with more severe outcomes than flu or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection. Differences became less pronounced, however, during the 2023 to 2024 season. The 30-day risk of death during the 2022 to 2023 season was slightly higher for COVID-19 (1.0%) compared to influenza (0.7%) or RSV

(0.7%), but similar during the 2023 to 2024 season (*JAMA Network Open*).

AMERICA: Females were associated with higher risk of long COVID in a study of 12,276 people who had experienced SARS-CoV-2 infection. Females were also associated with significantly higher overall long COVID risk when the analysis was restricted to nonpregnant participants (*JAMA Network Open*).

GERMANY: A new study based on German long-COVID patients shows 68% experience the same symptoms in year 2 as in year 1 of the chronic condition. The study adds to the current understanding of the long-term prognosis of post-COVID-19 syndrome (*PLoS Medicine*).

AMERICA: People with opioid use disorder enrolled in Medicaid were less likely to receive telehealth care after the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to patients with private insurance. Researchers found that while Medicaid patients were more likely to receive telehealth care compared to privately insured patients before the COVID-19 pandemic, they were 43.7% less likely than privately insured patients to receive any opioid use disorder treatment after the pandemic (*Health Services Research*).

CALIFORNIA: A laboratory owner has been sentenced to nine years in prison for her role in submitting false claims for unnecessary COVID-19 test that used nasal swab specimens from nursing home residents and others, resulting in Medicare being wrongly billed for \$369 million. Lourdes Navarro owner of Health Care Providers Laboratory, along with partner Imran Shams. The pair collected specimens from nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools and other facilities to run COVID-19 testing. Shams is already serving a 10-year sentence (*DOJ news release*).

AMERICA: Although vaccines have proved effective against Covid-19 and its variants, they are not able to prevent their transmission, and so new drugs

are being sought to keep pace with the continuously mutating virus. In a Harvard Medical School investigation, prior use of bisphosphonates (BPs) such as alendronate and zoledronate was associated with significantly reduced odds of testing for SARS-CoV-2, being diagnosed with COVID-19, and having COVID-19-related hospitalizations (*Pharmacy Times*).

AMERICA: Regardless of race and ethnicity, all individuals experienced an increased risk of long-term nursing home (NH) stay or death during the COVID-19 pandemic. NH residents were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, accounting for 22% of cases. In particular, NHs with the highest proportion of Black residents experienced 3 times as many COVID-19-related deaths (*JAMA Network Open*).

CHINA: Patients with COVID-19 who developed chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP) as a complication could follow a specific pattern in medical management. A retrospective study in China analyzed possible associations between COVID-19 and neuroimmune complications in patients diagnosed with COVID-19 during Omicron (*Frontiers in Immunology*).

WASHINGTON, D.C: Before leaving office, the Biden administration approved the appointments of eight new candidates to a critical committee that helps set U.S. vaccination policy — a burst of activity within a matter of a few months that could, in theory, make it more difficult for the Trump administration to shape the panel with its own appointees (*Stat*).

COVID-19, 02/02/2025

World Total Cases
777,315,739

World Total Deaths
7,083,869

U.S. Total Deaths
1,212,505

World Health Organization

Pandemic Levelled Out Sepsis Outcomes

A study of 3 million Medicare beneficiaries tracked adults aged 65 and older who were living independently in their homes between 2016 and 2021 (pre-pandemic). It examined their likelihood of requiring long-term nursing home care or experiencing death after hospital discharge for sepsis.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a dramatic improvement in sepsis outcomes, with the rate of long-term nursing home stays or deaths dropping from 13.5% to 6.9%.

However, this positive trend stalled during the pandemic, affecting all racial and ethnic groups similarly.

JAMA Network Open, 01/24/2025

CDC Stops Working with World Health Organization

U.S. public health officials have been told to stop working with the World Health Organization (WHO).

A CDC official sent a memo to senior leaders at the agency telling them that all staff who work with the WHO must immediately stop their collaborations and "await further guidance."

The decree hauls work on outbreaks of Marburg virus and mpox in Africa. It also comes as health authorities around the world are monitoring bird flu outbreaks among U.S. livestock.

President Trump last week issued an executive order to begin the process of withdrawing the U.S. from WHO.

MedPage Today, 01/28/2024

Generators Mandated in Texas' Largest County

Harris County, Texas became the first Texas county to implement a backup generator mandate on its long-term care facilities. The mandate comes amid the recent report from Harris County Public Health on how heat-related illness during Houston's summer months is on the rise.

Consequently, the county fire marshal proposed changes to the fire code,

which were adopted last month by the Harris County Commission.

The mandate affects the unincorporated area of Harris County — the most populous in Texas — which excludes the City of Houston, but is home to more than 2.5 million Texans, according to the Texas Assisted Living Association.

Senior Living, 01/14/2025

Feds Charge LTC Exec With Exploiting Minors

Jacob Walden, 38, a co-owner and executive of Emerald Healthcare, has been indicted on six federal charges for alleged child exploitation offenses.

Federal investigators allege that Walden contacted 11 teenage girls, aged 14 to 17, on social media, enticing them to create explicit content in exchange for payment. He reportedly directed the victims to follow specific instructions and used coercive tactics to obtain the material.

Walden's company operates nursing homes across the country. He was arrested and remains in a Brooklyn federal jail after pleading not guilty during a hearing in Islip, New York.

The Express Tribune, 01/24/2025

Firefighters Credit Staff For Containing SNF Blaze

Firefighters say quick staff action kept a room fire from spreading at Brandywine Healthcare in Greenfield, Indiana one day last week.

Greenfield Fire leaders say nursing home staff acted quickly, noticing a fire in a patient room, promptly removing the patient and closing the door to help contain the flames and activating the fire alarm.

Twenty-eight residents in the affected wing were either evacuated or sheltered in place.

One resident was treated and transported to the hospital, and a staff member was treated for smoke inhalation at the scene.

Daily Reporter, 01/23/2025

ONE COLUMN

Amid the Wildfires Medical Workers Did their Job

The rapidly spreading wildfires that have transformed much of Los Angeles County into a raging hellscape are not only upending the lives of tens of thousands of residents and business owners, but also stressed the region's hospitals, health clinics, first responders, and nursing homes.

At least one medical clinic burned down. Senior patients were evacuated by ambulance from nursing facilities as embers swirled around them and their providers. Medical offices have closed, and routine appointments have been canceled.

Some providers have lost homes or had to evacuate their neighborhoods, keeping them from work in many cases and making it a challenge for some health care centers to maintain sufficient staffing.

Amid the maelstrom, doctors, nurses, and other caregivers did their jobs.

Ravi Salgia, an oncologist at City of Hope National Medical Center in Duarte, saw the house above his Eaton Canyon home go up in flames. As debris and sparks fell, he, his wife, and their older daughter estimated they had no more than seven minutes to get out. In the middle of the night, Salgia got a call that the hospital had become an emergency command center and was at risk of evacuation, meaning he needed to help evaluate patients and make discharge preparations.

Salgia arrived at the hospital at 2:30 a.m. Wednesday. He was joined by colleagues, many of whom had also evacuated their homes.

"We all felt very strongly that we needed to take care of our patients — no matter what's happening to us physically and emotionally, what's happening to our houses — that we need to make sure that the people we serve were taken care of," Salgia said.

At the time, he didn't know if his house was still standing.

KFF Health News, 01/14/2025

White House Freeze on Spending Causes Chaos

A federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration's freeze on federal spending for grant and assistance programs, but only after a day of anxiety, growing controversy and funding chaos.

Elected officials said early Tuesday afternoon that Medicaid portals in all 50 states had gone down in response to a surprise freeze announced by the White House late Monday, sending state officials and some healthcare providers into an initial panic.

By late Tuesday, it appeared that access to Medicaid was being restored. Still, confusion festered about the spending freeze and its impact on healthcare providers and patients.

McKnight's, 01/29/2025

Think White House Backed Off the Freeze? Think Again

After ordering a pause on all federal grants and loans on Monday, the office of Management and Budget rescinded that order Wednesday.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, however, subsequently posted on X (formerly Twitter) that the White House rescinded the OMB's memo about the freeze, not the freeze itself.

"This is NOT a rescission of the federal funding freeze. It is simply a rescission of the OMB memo, Leavitt said. "The President's EO's on federal funding remain in full force and effect and will be rigorously implemented."

Senior Living, 01/29/2025

Ransomware Breach Affects 70K Residents' Data

Several SNFs in Ohio and Pennsylvania have sent letters to thousands of residents informing them of a data breach that gained access to their names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, and other sensitive information.

Approximately 70,000 HCF Management residents from facilities across the chain's network of SNFs had their data stolen by RansomHub, a

ransomware organization and placed onto the group's dark web website.

Last October Hempfield Manor in Greensburg, PA learned that a third party gained access to certain of its management company's computer systems.

McKnight's, 01/29/2025

Healthcare Bankruptcies Down, but Up Over Time

Healthcare bankruptcies reached their second-highest levels in six years in 2024.

The 57 filings in 2024 were down from 79 in 2023. The average from 2019 to 2022 was 42 filings per year,

A report by healthcare restructuring advisory firm Gibbons Advisors looked at skilled nursing facilities, assisted living communities, independent living communities and continuing care retirement/life plan communities, among other types of healthcare-related entities.

With federal interest rates cut twice in the last quarters of 2024 and another decrease expected this year, Gibbins said, the healthcare industry should see an increase in mergers and acquisitions activity.

Senior Living, 01/24/2025

Hospice Groups Sue Over Special Focus Program

Associations and providers representing home care and hospice in Texas, Indiana, North Carolina and South Carolina sued HHS and Biden-era Secretary Xavier Becerra to block the hospice Special Focus Program (SFP) from taking effect.

The plaintiffs charged HHS violated the Administrative Procedure Act for finalizing the SFP without addressing "serious and arbitrary" flaws stakeholders pointed out when the program was proposed.

Among their concerns is the algorithm CMS is using to identify the list of the worst-performing hospices making it difficult for resident and families to "to find trustworthy providers."

Briefly in the News

Loretta C. Ford, a pediatric nurse who worked tenaciously to expand access to health services and co-founded the profession of Nurse Practitioner which helped to transform the way millions of Americans receive health care, died Jan. 22 at her home in Wildwood, Florida. She was 104 (*The Washington Post*).

Health advocates find themselves in an uncomfortable position: voicing cautious support for some of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.'s ideas while warning of the catastrophic consequences of others "If there's an opportunity to advance the public health, you have to seize it," said Dr. Peter Lurie, a former FDA official who now leads the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest. "So you can't ignore the guy on everything because you oppose him on some things." (*AP*).

President Trump has said that RFK Jr. – his nominee to run HHS – would investigate why autism spectrum disorder diagnoses are rising. Although autism prevalence is rising, "There have been extensive studies researching potential links to routine childhood vaccinations and autism diagnoses, and the results have shown that no such link exists," said Eric Burnett, MD, of Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City (*MedPage Today*).

An improving scientific understanding of the biology of aging is leading some scientists, doctors and entrepreneurs to argue that aging is a disease. It's a major driver of illness and death, they say, and classifying it as such could make it easier to get drugs approved to treat aging itself, rather than just age-related health problems. (*The Wall Street Journal*).

An Alabama woman passed a major milestone Saturday to become the longest living recipient of a pig organ transplant – healthy and full of energy with her new kidney for 61 days and counting. Only four other Americans have received hugely experimental transplants of gene-edited pig organs – two hearts and two kidneys – and none lived more than two months (*AP*).