

IN THE NEWS

News for LTC Professionals
in 100 Words-or-Less

10/16/2022

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Vol 6

No 42

They said it

"It's time to fix our country's broken system of financing, oversight and support for nursing homes" LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan

"You see a friend that you weren't sure was alive or dead and that brings you joy. A joy that is so much more than the loss of property" Ft. Myers Beach City Councilman Bill Veach whose house was destroyed in Hurricane Ian

"One thing that I am sure about, and that I see very clearly is my prediction, and that is that you and your team and your company are going to survive this pandemic. You are going to make it" AHCA/NCAL President and CEO Mark Parkinson said during the opening session of the AHCA/NCAL annual convention

White House: COVID Care Should be 'Routine' in SNFs

The White House is urging nursing home clinicians to make COVID-19 prevention and treatment drugs a more routine part of clinical care.

Older adults continue to face an outsized risk for severe disease, and nursing homes are increasingly the place of COVID-19 death.

Although COVID-19 mortality has fallen overall, older adults make up an increasing share of deaths. Rates grew from 24% in January to 40% in September among those aged 65 and older.

Currently that group accounts for 90% of all deaths, and adults aged 75 and older account for 70% of all deaths.

McKnight's Clinical Daily News, 10/11/22

Parkinson: Things are Looking Up for LTC

While hallway conversations at the 73rd annual American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living convention expressed concerns about regulatory burdens and unceasing staffing demands, President and CEO Mark Parkinson told providers that the worst may be behind them.

Skilled nursing occupancy still averages about 5% below pre-pandemic levels nationally, but 30% of operators are now at or above their pre-pandemic numbers.

"The naysayers that were out there that said, 'People will never come back to facilities, the sector will never survive,' were simply wrong," Parkinson said.

McKnight's, 10/10/22

Also Parkinson: We will Survive the Pandemic

Although providers have steered clear of making predictions, at the opening session of the AHCA/NCAL convention CEO Mark Parkinson predicted the sector will survive the pandemic.

Parkinson noted, the average industry margin, pre-pandemic, was 2%. Once the pandemic hit, that margin took a dive and those who were considered average were now losing roughly 4%.

He said government money is why SNFs have remained standing.

Additionally, Parkinson acknowledged certain staffing successes, including the fact that 30% of providers were not using agency staffing at all.

"We are at ... A 20-mile marker of a 26-mile marathon, he said.

Skilled Nursing News, 10/10/22

Your Insurance Rates Are Headed Skyward

Rising commercial insurance rates combined with coverage prices that typically outpace cost-of-living increases spell almost certain upcoming hikes in providers' liability and commercial policies.

The insurance advisory firm Willis Towers Watson noted that liability prices were already edging up by early 2022, and that the mounting cost of responding to all sorts of claims would lead insurers to pass those costs on to policyholders.

For over a decade insurance cost increased, during most periods, above the consumer price index. But with pandemic relief is drying up and the PHE with its extra funding going away soon providers are especially vulnerable.

McKnight's, 10/03/22

Mass. Latest to Collect on Centene's Billing Boondoggle

Massachusetts has become the latest state to settle with Centene Corp., the nation's largest Medicaid managed-care insurer, over allegations that it overbilled the state's Medicaid program for pharmacy services.

Centene will pay \$14.2 million to Massachusetts.

A review by the Massachusetts Attorney General found "irregularities in the pricing and reporting of pharmacy benefits and services" by Centene's pharmacy benefits manager, Engolve Pharmacy Solutions.

Before the Massachusetts agreement, Centene had settled with Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, and Washington for a total of \$475 million.

Kaiser Health News, 10/06/22

Two Charged with Abuse Of 87-year-old Resident

Two employees of Solidago Health and Rehab, a nursing home in Texas City, Texas, have been charged with abuse of the elderly after a video camera caught two women hitting, kicking and dragging an 87-year-old resident.

Lisa Jo Cooper, 61, and Kecia Danielle Johnson are each being held on a \$100,000 bond.

The family had installed a ring camera "a year or two ago."

The nursing home fired the two women, but the family wants the facility shut down.

KHOU-TV, 10/07/22

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

EUROPE: As the U.S. heads into a third pandemic winter, the first hints are emerging that another possible surge of COVID-19 infections could be on its way. The first hint of what could be in store is what's happening in Europe. Infections have been rising in many European countries including the U.K., France and Italy. In the past what happens in Europe is a harbinger for what will happen in the U.S. (*NPR Shots*).

BOSTON: Health officials are concerned about elevated levels of the coronavirus in the city's wastewater, after the concentration climbed 3.1% last week and nearly 100% in the past two weeks. Public health commissioner, Dr. Bisola Ojikutu, said the elevated concentration in the wastewater is "very concerning" because increases in COVID-19 related hospitalizations, combined with flu season, will cause "major strain" on Boston's healthcare system (*MarketWatch*).

AMERICA: Experts in public health say COVID-19 contributed to a rise in sexually transmitted infections by preventing people from getting routine health care, where STI screenings can occur. It also siphoned public health workers from STI work to focus on COVID-19. One example: In 2021, the rate of syphilis in the U.S. reached 51.5 cases per 100,000 people, the highest rate since 1990 and the greatest number of overall cases (171,074) since 1951 (*PEW Trusts*).

AMERICA: If more people in the United States get their booster by the end of the year, about 90,000 Covid-19 deaths could be prevented this fall and winter. But a study published by The Commonwealth Fund indicates if booster vaccinations continue at their current pace, the nation could see a peak of more than 1,000 Covid-19 deaths per day this winter (*CNN*).

CHINA: Researchers have developed a mask that lets users know if they've been exposed to Covid-19 or the flu, a development that could help vulnerable populations even as the use of face coverings falls and more nations ease

virus restrictions. A sensor built into a mask was able to detect the Covid-19, H5N1 and H1N1 influenza viruses in the air within 10 minutes and send notifications (*Bloomberg*).

OKLAHOMA: Nearly half of Oklahoma's overall population has declined the COVID-19 vaccine. Yet more than 90% of seniors in the state have completed at least one round of inoculations, and almost two-thirds have received at least one booster. Both figures fall close to national averages. The same pattern plays out in other Republican-majority states. Public health data suggests red-state resistance to the COVID-19 vaccine is largely among the young (*The Hill*).

AMERICA: Only 74% of nursing home residents in the U.S. and 51% of all staff had received one or more COVID-19 booster shots as of Sept. 18. The booster rates vary greatly by state. Arizona reported the lowest percentage, 59%, for resident booster rates and Vermont reported the highest at 92%. For staff, Mississippi reported the lowest, 32%, and Massachusetts reported the highest at 96% (*Kaiser Family Foundation*).

KENTUCKY: Tammy Jo Goodwin pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud and was fined \$30,000. Godwin, an accountant, created fake financial and tax documents used in fraudulent applications for coronavirus relief loans for Randall "Rocky" Blankenship Jr. to use in applications for funding from the Paycheck Protection Program. Blankenship ultimately received \$1.3 million and was sentenced to 3 ½ years in prison (*Lexington Herald Leader*).

AMERICA: Fueled by, among other things, the economic hangover from the pandemic, has led to a swelling in the numbers of homeless people. In Sacramento, CA homeless numbers have risen 68% since the pandemic began. Numbers are also up about 30% in South Dakota and Prince George's County, Maryland, and 15% in Asheville, North Carolina (*AP*).

AMERICA: Approximately 4% of eligible people have received the new coronavirus booster shot, leaving many susceptible to a virus that has killed more than 1 million Americans. Only about 105 million U.S. adults — roughly 40% — have received the third shot of vaccine initially offered a year ago. That's far lower than countries like the U.K., where more than 70% of adults have gotten a third dose (*The Washington Post*).

AMERICA: Recently released CDC and Center for Health Statistics data found that more than 80% of people with long covid experience limitations in day-to-day activities. In adults, 14.2% who have tested positive experienced long covid for some period of time, while nearly 2% continue to experience long-term symptoms that have significant impact on their day-to-day activities (*CDC, NCHS*).

MINNESOTA – KENTUCKY: The feds have filed suit to seize a mosque and health clinic in Louisville. The government said the buildings were purchased using money stolen from a program to feed kids in Minnesota where a complex web of groups there bilked the government out of \$250 million. Part of the money was then used to buy the buildings in Louisville. Forty-seven people have been charged in the fraud scheme (*WAVE-TV*).

AMERICA: As many as 10 million people may still be entitled to receive a COVID-19 stimulus payment. The GAO posted on its blog during the week that Americans with little or no income, who are not required to pay taxes, have until Nov. 15 to complete a simplified tax return in order to get their stimulus checks (*The Hill*).

COVID-19, 10/15/2022

Global Cases – Deaths
624,497,578 – 6,567,035

U.S. Cases – Deaths
96,945,785 – 1,065,108

226.2 = 70% of the country's population is fully vaccinated

Johns Hopkins University

WH Czar – Get Boosted & Treated You Won't Die

Dr. Ashish Jha, head of the White House Covid task force, said the U.S. has made major strides in fighting Covid since the early days of the pandemic.

"If you are up to date with your vaccines and if you get treated if you have a breakthrough infection, your risk of dying from Covid is now close to zero," Jha said.

Health officials are expecting Covid infections to increase in November through January as they have every fall and winter since the pandemic began.

Jha said everyone ages 12 and older should get their new omicron Covid boosters by Halloween.

CNBC, 10/11/22

Keep Your Mask on - APIC Says So

A major association for infection prevention professionals is strongly urging its members to continue masking in patient care areas even though the CDC loosened its masking recommendations.

The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) cited indicators such as wastewater surveillance and increased COVID-19 case counts abroad as evidence of a potential wave of new cases in the coming months.

In addition to the oncoming flu season and evidence of COVID-19's continued presence, APIC said the seven-day lag in CDC COVID-19 testing data could limit the ability to detect surges in real time.

McKnight's, 10/04/22

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McKnight's, 10/03/22

LTC Leading Flood of Healthcare Bankruptcies

From 2021 through June 2022, 30 senior care providers declared bankruptcy, representing more than half of bankruptcies among large healthcare companies with more than \$10 million in liabilities during that time.

During earlier phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, government funding and waivers and extensions from lenders buoyed struggling healthcare providers.

But many of those resources and flexibilities are gone and there is now more pressure on cash flow.

Clare Moylan, principal at Gibbins Advisors observed most of the pressure is on skilled nursing and senior living facilities but expects it to shift to hospitals soon as expenses climb.

Modern Healthcare, 09/29/22

Younger SNF Residents in General Display Mental Illness

A trio of Harvard University researchers found that younger long-stay nursing home residents were far more likely to have severe mental illness than their senior counterparts.

And while SNF use among seniors had fallen in almost all states between 2013-2019 due to policy shifts that favor in-home care, the number of younger residents in facilities remained stagnant and even grew in some places.

Alaska, Vermont and Oregon had the lowest use of nursing homes by young people at the end of the study period in 2019; while Missouri, Ohio and Illinois had the highest

McKnight's, 10/04/22

ONE COLUMN

New Jersey Would Defund One & Two Star Facilities

A bill that would use the federal government's Five-Star ratings system as a means to identify and punish poor quality nursing homes passed a New Jersey senate committee Thursday, drawing criticism in the process.

Two senators who balk at the state funding nursing homes that rate only 1 or 2 two stars introduced the bill.

The measure would require the state's Department of Human Services to examine whether sanctions should be imposed against nursing homes that earn a single star in two consecutive quarters.

Penalties could include pausing new admissions or withholding Medicaid reimbursement.

The committee also passed three other nursing home related bills.

One gives the Department of Health authority to appoint a management team or a monitor after a nursing home shows a pattern of violations. That monitor would be paid by the nursing home.

Another enables the creation of mission critical teams to enter a long-term care facility to help an operator who is confronting an outbreak or emergency.

The fourth bill would give an additional \$1 million to the Office of State Long-Term Care Ombudsman and would increase its authority to help all LTC residents, not just the elderly.

There was at least one provider objection.

James McCracken, president and CEO of Leading Age New Jersey & Delaware, pointed out Five-Star data can be two years out of date.

"We are not opposed to penalties for poor-performing facilities," McCracken told the committee. "We are concerned about the piling on of facilities, which ultimately may inhibit them from making the changes they need."

NJ.com, 10/06/22

Staff Minimums OK But Not Without Funding

Even with the shortfall of available staff, many operators are in favor of higher staffing levels, but not without state or federal funding to hire and retain.

Others hope the types of positions counted in a staffing minimum will be expanded beyond registered nurses RNs, LPNs and CNAs.

Nearly 67% of survey respondents said they would also like to see other positions considered in creating a minimum staffing standard. Therapy providers were at the top of the list, followed by social workers and psychologists, temporary nursing assistants (TNAs) and activity coordinators.

Skilled Nursing News, 10/09/22

MA Plans Expanding Is that a Good Thing?

Several large insurance providers are expanding their Medicare Advantage plans to new states and hundreds more counties, effective in 2023, adding pressure on skilled nursing operators as enrollment booms.

Aetna, with 3.2 million MA members, is adding nearly 200 counties, while Cigna will grow its geographic footprint by 22%. UnitedHealthGroup, Humana and Elevance Health also increased their presence.

A recent Kaiser Health News report highlighted complaints that nursing home patients using MA have been released before they were well enough to go home, and in fewer days than Medicare covers.

McKnight's, 10/05/22

Ensign Likely is the Top Operator Now

Ensign announced a series of SNF acquisitions and long-term leases dearly this month including one facility in Arizona, two in South Carolina and six in Texas. The deals bring Ensign's growing portfolio to 268 health care operations across 13 states.

Those nine buildings probably make Ensign the largest operator in the country, pushing past Genesis for the top spot.

In addition to Ensign and Genesis, the largest SNF providers by facility include Life Care Centers of America, HCR ManorCare (ProMedica Senior Care), Providence Group and Consulate Health Care.

Skilled Nursing News, 10/03/22

Experts Predict REITs Will be Bullish in Next Year

REIT dealmaking for the rest of this year and into the next will be active and largely driven by the desire to deepen existing or secure new partnerships with skilled nursing operators that have survived the pandemic exceptionally well.

Rising interest rates will level the playing field to the benefit of REITs,

Changing Medicaid reimbursement rates, stabilizing net hires and current inflation costs also play a role in REIT dealmaking plans for the rest of this year and into 2023.

Skilled Nursing News, 10/07/22

Clinicians Want to Switch Careers and/or Employers

About 25% of physicians, advanced practice providers and nurses surveyed said they are thinking about switching careers – 33% want to leave their current employer. The survey, from global consultancy Bain & Company, included a random sampling of 573 full-time clinicians across various specialties, including geriatric medicine.

Forty percent of respondents gave their employers low marks on the top five criteria they deemed necessary for job satisfaction. These included better compensation, support to deliver high-quality patient care, a more manageable workload, flexible work arrangements and more clinically focused job responsibilities.

Burnout was the top factor, cited by 89% of respondents.

McKnight's Clinical Daily News, 10/12/22

Briefly in the News

CMS has posted a Request for Information (RFI) seeking public input on the concept of CMS creating a directory with information on health care providers and services or a "National Directory of Healthcare Providers and Services." The directory could serve as a "centralized data hub" for all health care directory and digital contact information. The RFI is open for a 60-day public comment period ending December 6 (*CMS news release*).

During the pandemic women consistently reported more mental health problems than men. It was probably related to higher stress due to increased childcare chores, domestic violence, and economic difficulties due to employment disruptions. Adolescents and young adults were inexplicably affected too. Studies in China and Japan indicated marked increases in suicide rates in children and adolescents during school closure periods. U.S. Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian individuals demonstrated higher unmet mental healthcare needs during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Nature Medicine*).

To help address challenges to developing a skilled healthcare workforce, the U.S. Department of Labor is launching an \$80 million funding opportunity through its Nursing Expansion Grant Program to support nursing training programs. The program seeks to expand the pipeline of nurses at a time when the BLS predicts 275,000 additional nurses will be needed by 2030 (*U.S. Dept of Labor*).

A study looking at racial and gender discrimination in LTC (resident-to-staff) revealed extensive unreported instances of discrimination from residents. Floor staff framed residents' discriminatory behavior as a condition of employment or attributed resident behavior to their health or cognitive status. Mid-management framed experiences around staff safety. Upper management acknowledged staff rights without invoking discrimination rhetoric (*Gerontologist*).

The National Association for the Support of Long-Term Care officially became ADVION when the association of ancillary services providers unveiled its new name and expanded focus at its annual meeting (*McKnight's*).