

Cordt Kassner

From: Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter
<subscriptions@hospicepalliativecaretoday.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 9, 2023 4:00 AM
To: Cordt Kassner
Subject: Your Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter for 12/09/23



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December 9th, 2023

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Headlines

[Why health systems are dropping their IT teams](#)

Modern Healthcare

December 7, 2023

The digital transformation is underway at health systems but it increasingly doesn't involve in-house IT departments. Health systems are transitioning their analytics and tech employees to managed service companies as they look to scale virtual care, artificial intelligence and analytics initiatives. By moving the work out-of-house and the employees with it, a process called rebadging, health systems struggling with razor-thin margins say they can deploy IT projects more efficiently while saving on costs. . . . In November, consulting firm Guidehouse surveyed health system CEOs and chief financial officers about their top three IT investment priorities in 2024. A third of respondents said they have expanded relationships with IT outsourcing partners ... But there are downsides to the strategy. The transition of employees can be bumpy. Also, by offloading IT employees, the quality of work can be worse when the outside company doesn't understand the system as well. Aaron Miri, chief information and digital officer at Jacksonville, Florida-based Baptist Health, has used contractors for various projects, including the systemwide install of Epic. But he said the concept doesn't work for certain tech-related projects, such as improving employee engagement. "You're giving up something to net something," he said. "You can't have it cheap and have top quality, happy employees. Something has to give. You have to consider the tradeoffs."

[How the Hospice Care Index Can Help Shape an Operator's Future](#)

Hospice News

December 7, 2023

Strong performance on the Hospice Care Index is becoming increasingly essential to securing payer and referral contracts and will be a key consideration in the federal government's forthcoming Special Focus Program. ... Health care consumers are also becoming more aware of these data. ... HCI data will be a key component of the algorithm that CMS will use to determine which hospices qualify for the SFP, coming in 2024. CMS plans to target hospices who fall within the lowest 10% of performers on a range of quality metrics and survey data.

Hospice Provider News

['Rock Your Ugly Sweater' event raised money for Hospice of Siouxland](#)

KTIV-TV (Sioux City, IA)

December 7, 2023

Sioux City, IA—Christmas is just days away, and one local non-profit combined the spirit of Christmas with raising money for a good cause. Thursday night, Hospice of Siouxland held its 2nd annual 'Rock your Ugly Sweater' event. The 300 guests showed up in their craziest and ugliest Christmas sweaters to raise money for the organization. ... Especially for their Uncompensated Care, We Honor Veterans, and Making Memories programs.



[South Arkansas Regional Hospital announces new inpatient hospice services](#)

Banner News (Magnolia, AR)

December 8, 2023

Magnolia, AR—South Arkansas Regional Hospital in El Dorado now offers general inpatient hospice services in partnership with Arkansas Hospice, the state's largest non-profit provider of hospice care. The new service, which went into effect Dec. 1, demonstrates both organizations' commitment to meeting the comprehensive healthcare needs of the community and ensuring compassionate care for patients and their families. ... With this GIP partnership, Arkansas Hospice will augment the direct patient care provided by South Arkansas Regional Hospital with an interdisciplinary team of physicians, nurses, social workers and chaplains to support patients and families during this challenging time. In addition, GIP patients will have access to dedicated family rooms designed to create a welcoming environment and ensure the comfort and privacy of patients and their loved ones, according to a press release issued by SARH.

[Holly Ball 2023 Raises Over \\$850,000 for Three Central Minnesota Staples](#)

KNSI-AM (St. Cloud, MN)

December 7, 2023

St. Cloud, MN—The CentraCare Foundation says the Hollyball Gala Saturday night saw 1,200 people raising over \$850,000 for three important central Minnesota staples. The proceeds will benefit the Central Minnesota Child Advocacy Center, CentraCare Hospice, and the Coborn Cancer Center. Living up to this year's theme, "Be The Good," the money will help the hospice center purchase the Empathy app which provides real-time support, day or night, for families of hospice patients during the grieving process.

Palliative Care Provider News

[NJ extends Medicaid palliative care for poor and elderly](#)

NJ Spotlight News

December 7, 2023

New Jersey plans to expand health insurance coverage so that low-income residents with a serious advanced illness can get pain relief and other palliative care at home, regardless of their prognosis, or if they live independently, in a nursing home or assisted living. The state Assembly is expected to take a final vote Thursday on bipartisan legislation that adds community-based palliative care—including specialized medical treatment, emotional and spiritual support and other services to improve patients' quality of life—to the list of benefits Medicaid will pay for in New Jersey.



Clinical News

[Franklin resident makes Christmas care packages for hospice patients](#)

Daily Journal (Franklin, IN)

December 7, 2023

Franklin, IN—The shining silver bell, tied with a red ribbon, was etched with one word—“Believe.” Clarice Duits thought it was perfect. The Franklin resident was searching for special gifts to include in care packages for patients in hospice this holiday season. She had chocolate and candy canes, but needed something to tie the gifts together while showing each patient they weren’t alone. “I started thinking of Santa, and doing good for others, and that made me think of ‘The Polar Express,’” she said. “One idea just led to another, and I looked up Polar Express bells, and lo and behold, there they were.” This holiday season, Duits has crafted more than 60 gift baskets to be distributed to hospice patients. ... She worked with Main Street Hospice in Franklin, which will distribute them to its patients throughout December. The effort speaks to the importance community members hold to the work hospices do, said Cheryl Mioduski, volunteer coordinator for Main Street Hospice.

[1 in 8 older adults use cannabis; experts urge screening](#)

McKnight's Long Term Care News

December 8, 2023

Cannabis use in older adults is on the rise and clinicians should screen for it, according to a new study. A report on people ages 50 through 80 finds that 12% of older adults say they've consumed a substance that contains delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in the past

year. Additionally, 4% of people in that age group say they have substances that include THC multiple times a week. ... The new findings were published in *Cannabis and Cannabinoids Research* last month by a team from the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. Authors of the report said that people taking the products need more education on them, and older adults need to be screened for cannabis-related risks. ... The poll asked about products containing THC, but didn't differentiate between medical and recreational use of cannabis.

[Awareness, Education Keys to Trauma-Informed Hospice Care](#)

Hospice News

December 7, 2023

Having a greater understanding around the impacts of trauma and abuse can help hospices improve end-of-life experiences for patients and working conditions for staff. Training and education are keys to caring for patients and employees with unique needs impacted by trauma and abuse. ... Abuse and trauma experiences impact those delivering and receiving hospice care in many ways, some evident and some less apparent, according to Carole Fisher, president, National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation. ... "The impacts of trauma and abuse are important to include in staff training and education, as well as patient care delivery approaches and employee policies," Fisher stated. ... "Trauma-informed care involves having a complete understanding of a person's overall life experiences and orienting health services toward healing," according to Lara McKinnis, professional development specialist at Teleios Collaborative Network.

Regulatory News

[UnitedHealth hit with Medicare Advantage marketing complaint](#)

Modern Healthcare

December 7, 2023

Advocates for people with disabilities are calling on regulators [to] halt what they describe as misleading Medicare Advantage marketing by UnitedHealth Group. The Center for Medicare Advocacy, National Health Law Program, Disability Rights Connecticut and National Disability Rights Network wrote the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Federal Trade Commission and other state and federal officials Thursday to protest UnitedHealthcare advertisements for Dual Eligible Special Needs Plans appearing in Connecticut. The ads target people with both Medicare and Medicaid and spotlight extra benefits from Medicare Advantage plans that state and federal laws already require, the groups wrote. "Unquestionably, this misleading advertising is intended to induce, and has induced, thousands if not tens of thousands of older adults and disabled low-income individuals we are charged with representing to sign up for UnitedHealthcare's plan, having been led to believe this means they can get extra benefits," the letter says. UnitedHealth Group did not immediately respond to an interview request.

[New Mexico's Medicaid Rate Hike Bodes Well For Addus, Other Home-Based Care Providers](#)

Home Health Care News

December 7, 2023

New Mexico is increasing its reimbursement rates for providers that bill Medicaid in the state. Overall, providers are set to get an additional \$409 million in reimbursement. The increases will start taking shape on claims made on or after July 1, 2023. Another rate hike is expected in the future for CY 2025. "Thanks to this substantial funding boost, Medicaid providers across New Mexico will now receive reimbursements at rates as high as 120% of Medicare," Lorelei Kellogg, the acting director for the New Mexico Medicaid program, said in a press release. "By elevating rates, New Mexico Medicaid continues to work toward the goal of ensuring that all New Mexicans enrolled in the program have access to vital health care services."

M&A News

[Senators probe private equity hospital deals following CBS News investigation](#)

CBS News

December 7, 2023

The top Democrat and Republican on a powerful Senate committee launched a wide-ranging investigation into private equity's impact on the U.S. health care system on Wednesday. Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island and Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa sent letters to a constellation of financial firms seeking information about how their dealings in the healthcare space impact patient care. ... "As private equity has moved into health care, we have become increasingly concerned about the associated negative outcomes for patients," Whitehouse said in a statement to CBS News. "From facility closures to compromised care, it's now a familiar story: private equity buys out a hospital, saddles it with debt, and then reduces operating costs by cutting services and staff—all while investors pocket millions. Before the dust settles, the private equity firm sells and leaves town, leaving communities to pick up the pieces."

Post-Acute Care News

[Hospitals Think Some Dead Patients Are Alive](#)

Bloomberg

December 7, 2023

Neil Wenger, a professor of medicine at UCLA, was researching different ways of encouraging patients to make end-of-life care plans when he discovered something troubling—hundreds of patients who were seriously ill, according to the health system's records, were actually dead. This is a well-known but little-studied phenomenon, according to Wenger—until now. Wenger and his colleagues wrote up their findings in a short paper

that was published Monday in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. They identified 676 patients from UCLA's health system that were recorded as alive, but were actually dead, according to state data. At face value, it sounds absurd. But there are many reasons why it might happen, Wenger says. While patients who die in the hospital are automatically recorded as deceased in that system's database, patients who die at home are not. Same goes for patients who die at another health system with a different electronic records database. "The health system continues to act as if they're alive," Wenger says. "If we don't know they're dead, we can't do the right thing." ... "We think this is a really important finding that needs to be corrected," Wenger says.

Summit County nursing homes testing robots to address staff shortages

Akron (OH) Beacon Journal

December 6, 2023

Two Akron-area nursing homes—Copley Health Center and The Village of St. Edward—are turning to robots to help alleviate staffing shortages in their facilities. The robots are part of a pilot program facilitated by the Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities. Each facility has adopted different procedures for their robot to help with. Examples of tasks the robots perform include meal and package delivery, hydration carts and cleaning food trays and dining areas. ... So far during the pilot program, the two robots have traveled more than 163 miles and have made over 2,220 deliveries to residents. Though the robots are used daily and have been well received by staff and residents, they are not intended to replace human contact, according to the news release.

Patients stuck in Washington hospitals pose quandary for state lawmakers

Washington State Standard

December 6, 2023

Washington needs to do more to keep people from staying at hospitals longer than medically necessary, state health officials told lawmakers this week. Over the last five years, the Legislature has approved spending and policy changes to help shorten stays for "complex discharge" patients—those who are in hospitals but cannot be discharged to a long-term care or behavioral health facility for a variety of complicated reasons. In 2020, the average length of stay was 57 days for patients who were referred to the state for long-term support and Medicaid funding, compared to 32 days this year. But Bea Rector, assistant secretary for aging and long-term support at the Department of Social and Health Services, says 32 days is still too long.

Funding for nursing homes up 25% after state increase

South Dakota Searchlight

December 7, 2023

State funding for nursing homes is up an average of 25% statewide since the Legislature and Gov. Kristi Noem approved more money for them last winter. ... During the last legislative session, Noem and legislators approved 100% reimbursements for those [Medicaid] costs. The move, which went into effect in July, was a reaction to 15 nursing

homes closing across the state in recent years, in part due to insufficient reimbursement rates. ... The higher reimbursement rate infused roughly an extra \$49 million into nursing homes in the state.

[California system to lay off 160 amid planned home health sale](#)

Becker's Hospital CFO Report

December 6, 2023

Walnut Creek, Calif.-based John Muir Health is laying off 164 employees in Concord ahead of a planned sale of its home health services division to Cornerstone Home Healthcare. John Muir announced in October that it would transfer its home health assets to a company currently owned by Cornerstone; that transaction is expected to close Jan. 1. Once the deal is closed, Cornerstone will be the majority owner and John Muir will operate a 40% minority stake, a spokesperson for the health system told Becker's on Dec. 6. According to WARN documents filed with the state, 164 John Muir Home Health employees will be laid off by Dec. 29, but they have the opportunity to apply to the new company under Cornerstone.

Technology / Innovations News

[Dameron Hospital in Stockton hit by cyberattack](#)

KCRA-TV (Sacramento, CA)

December 5, 2023

Stockton, CA—Dameron Hospital in Stockton said it is investigating a cyberattack that has forced some patients to reschedule their procedures. The hospital said in a statement Tuesday that "patient care operations are functioning normally," which includes its emergency department. The hospital described the issue as a "data security incident that has impacted certain systems on our network." It did not say when the attack happened or describe which systems may have been compromised.

General News

[Mass. lawmakers approve measure allowing more home health care workers to unionize](#)

WBUR-FM (Boston, MA)

December 7, 2023

Thousands of home health care workers in Massachusetts are newly eligible to organize and join a union under legislation passed by the state legislature this week. Union officials estimate the change will allow some 4,000 home health care workers to unionize. About 58,000 personal care attendants paid by MassHealth are already unionized and represented by SEIU 1199.

[Ascension nurses begin strikes](#)

Becker's Hospital Review

December 7, 2023

Nurses at three Ascension hospitals in Texas and Kansas began one-day strikes Dec. 6, marking the second strikes for each hospital this year. The strikes involve members of the National Nurses Organizing Committee, an affiliate of National Nurses United. ... Union members have been in contract negotiations at the two Wichita hospitals since February 2023 and at the 391-bed Austin hospital since November 2022. They are striking to call attention to equipment and staffing issues at their organizations, according to NNU. ... "Patient safety is our top priority, and our hospitals remain open and well-prepared to continue to provide patient-centered, holistic care during these strikes," an Ascension spokesperson told Becker's on Dec. 6.

Non-print News

[A President's Grief](#)

Podcast

All There Is with Anderson Cooper/CNN.com

December 6, 2023

[For his podcast All There Is, about living with grief, CNN's Anderson Cooper interviewed President Biden, who, Cooper writes, has "been more open than any sitting US president about the deaths he's experienced and the grief he still lives with [having lost his wife and infant daughter when he was 30 and his older son Beau to brain cancer following Beau's deployment to Iraq]." When Cooper showed up at the White House for the interview, he asked if he could trade the traditional interview set up—two chairs far apart—for a more intimate setting across a table; Biden agreed. The result, Cooper says, was the most "personal interview about grief and loss" that a US president has ever taken part in.]

Anderson Cooper: Did you know how to grieve at that time?

President Joe Biden: "Well, I won the gene pool. I was raised by a mom and a dad who were—my mom was a person of faith, my dad was a guy who'd been through some tough times and just got up. The saying in the family was "just get up, just get up." And when you get knocked down, just get up. And I had the great advantage because when it happened to me, I had a whole family. My deceased wife and I had purchased a home. It had a barn. My brother moved in and turned the barn into a little apartment. My sister and her husband left their place and moved in with me to help me raise the kids. And we have an expression in our family, "if you have to ask, it's too late." I mean, for real."

To listen to the 38-minute podcast, click [here](#).

Today's Encouragement

Work for a cause, not for applause.
Live life to express, not to impress.

-Unknown

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