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**HOSPICE &
PALLIATIVE CARE
TODAY**

March 11th, 2024

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Headlines

Medicare Hospice – exploding in size but riddled with quality concerns

Penn LDI, by Hoag Levins; 3/8/24

Five top experts on hospice care convened in a virtual discussion of the Medicare Hospice program. This video is the full session.

- Ira Byock, MD
- Mary Ersek, PhD, RN
- Kimberly Sherrel Johnson, MD
- David Stevenson, PhD
- Rachel M. Werner, MD, PhD, Moderator

Since its launch 41 years ago, the Medicare Hospice program that covers the costs of care for terminally ill patients has exploded in size. One-fourth of Medicare spending now goes to hospice care as half of all the people who die are Medicare beneficiaries using the program. In 2000, there were 500,000 hospice users. There are now 1.8 million. The annual Medicare spending in that same period has gone from \$3 million to \$23 billion.

Publisher's notes: 1) I listened to this 1-hour video this weekend. It's definitely worth taking time to listen to these five experts and this discussion. 2) The author notes "one-fourth of Medicare spending now goes to hospice care". I suspect he meant to say "Medicare beneficiaries in their last year of life accounts for about 25% of total Medicare spending" per [this 2016 KFF article](#). Medicare 2022 hospice spend= \$23B, about 2.4% of Medicare's total spend of \$944B per [this CMS article](#).

Hospice Provider News

CMS to end Hospice MA Carve-In: Insights for home-based care providers

Home Health Care News, by Andrew Donlan; 3/7/24

Grand opening, grand closing. Hospice providers began to work with Medicare Advantage (MA) via the Value-Based Insurance Design (VBID) demonstration in 2021. At the end of 2024, the "hospice carve-in" model will cease. ... In this week's exclusive, members-only HHCN+ Update, I dive into what CMS' ditching of the hospice carve-in means for home health and hospice providers generally. I'll also get into what it may mean for that space between home-based care providers and MA plans moving forward.

Application period open for Excellence in Pursuit of Health Equity Award

MedTech Intelligence; 3/5/24

The Joint Commission and Kaiser Permanente are now accepting applications for the 2024 Bernard J. Tyson National Award for Excellence in Pursuit of Healthcare Equity. The award program will recognize a healthcare organization that led an initiative that achieved a *measurable, sustained reduction* in one or more disparities. ... Now in its fourth year, the award honors [Bernard J.] Tyson's legacy by presenting organizations the opportunity to earn national recognition for their efforts to improve healthcare equity, as well as share best practices and lessons learned with thousands of organizations across the country.



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Accelerate Growth
Accelerate Learning

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Samaritan gala raises record amount: Event helps fund services to the seriously ill and their families

The Sun Newspapers, by Christine Harkinson; 3/7/24

Samaritan's 2024 Celebration of Life Gala in Cherry Hill raised \$275,000 last month to support the nonprofit's life-enhancing services. ... Founded in Moorestown in 1980 as one of the first hospices in the country, Samaritan is now among New Jersey's leading providers of hospice care, palliative (comfort) medicine, at-home primary care, grief support and other services.

Ohio's Hospice cuts unnamed number of staff, CEO confirms

Dayton Daily News; by Samantha Wildow; 3/8/24

Ohio's Hospice has reduced its staff by an unnamed number of employees, the CEO confirmed to the Dayton Daily News. Ohio's Hospice is a partnership of nonprofit hospices in Ohio committed to "a shared vision of strengthening and preserving community-based hospices," the organization said. "Since our beginning, our focus has been and will always be on the patients and families we have the privilege of serving," said Kent Anderson, CEO of Ohio's Hospice. The nonprofit has faced "inflationary pressures," he said, which have impacted labor, energy and other costs.

Clinical News

Palliative care across the spectrum of heart failure

JACC Heart Fail; by Laura P Gelfman, Moritz Blum, Modele O Ogunniyi, Colleen K McIlvennan, Dio Kavalieratos, Larry A Allen; online ahead of print 2/27/24; print 3/8/24

Persons with heart failure (HF) often suffer from poor symptom control, decreased quality of life, and poor communication with their health care providers. ... New models are required that are better informed by high-quality data, engage a range of health care providers in primary palliative care

principles, and have clear triggers for specialty palliative care engagement, with specific palliative interventions tailored to patient's illness trajectory and changing needs.



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Description and outcomes of a palliative care pharmacist-led Transitions of Care program

J Palliat Med, by Connor McCormick, Mamta Bhatnagar, Robert M Arnold, Maria Felton Lowry; 3/6/24

Background: Patients with palliative care needs are at high risk of medication errors during transitions of care (TOC). Palliative Care Pharmacist Interventions surrounding Medication Prescribing Across Care Transitions (IMPACT) program was developed to improve the TOC process from hospital to community setting for cancer patients followed by palliative care.

Conclusion: Our pilot study demonstrates that integrating a pharmacist in TOC for seriously ill patients is feasible and valuable.

Compassionate extubation and beyond: Is there a need for more guidance in managing end-of-life in the intensive care unit?

Chest Physician, by Angela L. Birdwell, DO, MA; Nehan Sher, MD

Approximately 20% of deaths in the United States occur during or shortly after a stay in the ICU and approximately 40% of ICU deaths involve withdrawal of artificial life support (WOALS) or compassionate extubation. ... How the team approaches WOALS can make a difference to both patients and decision-makers. Unfortunately, there is striking variation in practice and lack of guidance in navigating issues that arise at end-of-life in the ICU.

Podcast: Outcomes post-cardiac arrest and palliative medicine consultation for seriously ill patients

The Rounds Table Podcast, Episode 81; recorded 3/7/24

This week, Drs. Mike and John Fralick discuss two recent papers exploring patient

outcomes after in-hospital cardiac arrest and the role of default Palliative Medicine consultation for seriously ill hospitalized patients. Two papers, here we go!

1. [Default Palliative Care Consultation for Seriously Ill Hospitalized Patients](#) (0:00 – 10:04).
2. [Duration of cardiopulmonary resuscitation and outcomes for adults with in-hospital cardiac arrest: retrospective cohort study](#) (10:04 – 16:25).



Programmatic palliative care consultations in pediatric heart transplant evaluations

Pediatr Cardiol, by Erika J Mejia, Rui Xiao, Jennifer K Walter, Chris Feudtner, Kimberly Y Lin, Aaron G DeWitt, Meeta Prasad Kerlin; 3/8/24

Guidelines advocate for integrating palliative care into the management of heart failure (HF) and of children with life-limiting disease. The potential impact of palliative care integration into pediatric HF on patient-centered outcomes is poorly understood. The present study sought to assess the association of programmatic implementation of palliative care into the heart transplant evaluation process with hospital-free days (HFD) and end of life (EOL) treatment choices.

Regulatory News

Frontline hospice staff need to understand new CMS survey methods

Hospice News, by Holly Vossel; 3/5/24

Ensuring staff are educated around revisions to hospice survey processes will be key to navigating ongoing regulatory changes in the industry. This year will bring further implementation of survey validation activities, but also new regulatory

oversight processes, according to Kim Skehan, vice president of accreditation for the Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP) organization.

The states where most Medicare beneficiaries have Medicare Advantage plans

Becker's Payer Issues, by Andrew Cass; 3/6/24

Twenty-six states now [have](#) more than half of their Medicare enrollees in Medicare Advantage plans, according to a March 5 report from Chartis, a healthcare advisory services firm. Nationwide, half of Medicare-eligible beneficiaries are now enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans. [Click on the title's link for] the 26 states where Medicare Advantage market penetration exceeds 50%.



CMS reports

CMS email; 3/8/24

1. CMS released its [eighth annual report on the evaluation of the Independence at Home Demonstration \(IAH\)](#).
2. CMS released its [second annual report on the evaluation of the Primary Care First Model \(PCF\)](#).
3. CMS posted the [National Impact Assessment Quality Measures Reports](#).
4. CMS released its [2023 accomplishments on the CMS Strategy Page](#) highlighting its work guided by the [CMS strategic pillars](#).

How CON laws influence hospice quality, program integrity

Hospice News, by Holly Vossel; 3/8/24

Variations in hospice certificate of need (CON) state laws are raising program

integrity concerns.

Notable mentions: Susan Ponder-Stansel, President and CEO of Alivia Care; Paul Ledford, President and CEO of the Florida Hospice & Palliative Care Association; Eddie Belluomini, COO of 1Care Hospice & 1Care Kids; Paula Sanders, Executive Director of the Georgia Hospice and Palliative Care Organization; Matt Hansen, Executive Director of the Homecare & Hospice Association of Utah.

Public Policy News

Editorial: 'Right to die' debate comes to Illinois. Both sides have merit, but we would vote no.

Chicago Tribune, by The Editorial Board; 3/8/24

Nothing prepared us for what we heard when talking to those on both sides of the rising movement calling for Illinois to join the 10 other states (and the District of Columbia) that allow terminally ill adults to choose when and how they want to end their own lives. ... *[Read article for background information]* ... We believe that Illinois should not pass this legislation ... We say this believing passionately in the value of palliative and hospice care and fully supporting family members and medical professionals who want to take an individual patient's wishes into account and not artificially sustain life beyond what is clearly the point of no return. We know that many inspiring people in this field quietly find ways to ease us gently from this world when our time is up.

Editor's Note: For another perspective, see this newsletter's article "The strength it takes to suffer," written by the daughter and wife of J. Randall Curtis, MD, MPH, who was "an intensive care and palliative medicine pioneer whose impact as a researcher, mentor, and humanist was legend long before his death."

The strength it takes to suffer [MAID story of J. Randall Curtis, MD, MPH, intensive care and palliative medicine pioneer]

JAMA Intern Med., by Alice Curtis, Amy Hamblin, MA, and William E. Rosa, PhD, MBE, APRN; 3/4/24

J. Randall Curtis, MD, MPH—my dad (A.C.) and my husband (A.H.)—was an intensive care and palliative medicine pioneer whose impact as a researcher, mentor, and humanist was legend long before his death. When Randy first revealed his diagnosis publicly, he said it was exhausting being strong. ... Throughout his career and illness [ALS], Randy came to appreciate medical aid

in dying (MAID) as an ethical way for physicians to care for patients. The moral edict of medicine—first, do no harm—does not mean, nor can it mandate, the ultimate prevention of death, but rather that the physician’s role is to ease suffering at all stages of living and dying. For Randy, the only end to his extreme suffering while ALS was surely killing him was the overwhelming act of hastening his own death. In his case, he was his own most compassionate physician.

Editor's Note: For another perspective, see this newsletter's article "Editorial: 'Right to Die' debate comes to Illinois," by The Editorial Board of the Chicago Tribune.

Mergers & Aquisition News

Why Northwell wants to buy Nuvance

Modern Healthcare, by Caroline Hudson; 3/6/24

The deal would create a system with 28 hospitals and more than 1,000 care sites across New York and Connecticut.

Editor's Note: Access to this article requires a subscription.

Post-Acute Care News

'Nothing less than a crisis' as 45 percent of SNFs cite serious financial issues in AHCA survey

McKnights Senior Living, by Kathleen Steele Gaivin; 3/6/24

Forty-five percent of skilled nursing facility participants in a new survey said they are “either operating in the red or barely breaking even.” The American Health Care Association survey of 441 nursing home providers, the results of which were released Tuesday, found that 42% of SNFs are operating on a total margin of 0% to 3%, and only 13% are operating with a total margin that is greater than 3%. AHCA’s State of the Sector Report also found that staffing challenges remain.

Nursing homes bury 63 percent of profits in related-party tunnels, but not all play the game: study

McKnights Long-Term Care News, by Josh Henreckson; 3/8/24

As much as 63% of nursing home profits in Illinois were hidden from state regulators using related party transactions in 2019, according to the results of a new study from UCLA and Lehigh University researchers. Those results are likely

indicative of a nationwide trend that has continued through the pandemic and into 2024, experts told *McKnight's Long-Term Care News* Thursday.

Scary 'state': Two-thirds of nursing home operators fear closure without staffing relief

McKnight's Long-Term Care News, by Josh Henreckson; 3/6/24

Of nearly 450 nursing home providers surveyed, two-thirds are concerned that escalating workforce challenges may force them to close their facility. More than 70% of nursing homes reported staffing levels lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic, with fully 99% saying they are hiring for open positions.

Technology / Innovations News

Mayo's plan to expand AI tool access in 2024

Becker's Health IT, by Naomi Diaz; 3/7/24

Rochester, MN-based Mayo Clinic has **saved** its nurses 30 seconds per In Basket message using generative AI. ... This AI-driven system assists clinicians by generating initial responses to patient messages that have nonurgent medical questions. ... The tool has been able to generate draft responses to 3.9 million patient messages in 11 months saving nurses approximately 30 seconds per message, leading to potential monthly time savings of 1,500 hours across the organization, according to the post.

Editor's Note: Even without purchasing expensive AI software, many basic software systems / email systems have similar systems to generate sample response phrases, e.g. Microsoft Outlook and Google's Gmail. Your clinicians are sure to have honed out numerous time-savers. Ask! Compile results, assess best practices and applaud their input.

General News

Beloved teacher dies of rare illness, students raise enough money to put her children through college

NBC News 10, Rochester, NY; by Jennifer Lewke; 3/6/24

A school of students, devastated by the sudden loss of a favorite teacher, worked together to ensure her legacy lives on. Emily Casey died less than a month after being diagnosed with a rare and frightening disease. In the two weeks since she

passed, her students at Our Lady of Mercy School have raised more than \$150,000 in her memory.

100+ hospitals, health systems among Newsweek's greatest workplaces for women

Newsweek / Becker's Hospital Review, by Kelly Gooch; 3/7/24

Newsweek has published its 2024 "America's Greatest Workplaces for Women" ranking, which includes hospitals and health systems. ... The best companies in the tiers of large companies (5,000+ employees), mid-size companies (1,000 to 4,999 employees) and small companies (500 to 999 employees) were recognized among the 1,000 greatest workplaces for women. ... [Click on the link above to the list gleaned by *Becker's* of hospitals and health systems.]

Western Slope lawmakers introduce bill to license funeral home operators

Grand Junction (CO) Daily Sentinel, by Elliott Wenzler; 3/6/24

[CO Senate Bill 173] would address one glaring issue with the funeral home industry in Colorado — it's the only state in the country that doesn't license funeral home operators.

Publisher's note: This legislative action is part of a broad response to the Return to Nature Funeral Home felony charges following discovery of 189 improperly stored bodies detailed in this [Colorado Springs Gazette story](#).

Today's Encouragement

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. - Henry S. Haskins

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