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March 18th, 2024

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Headlines

MedPAC releases March 2024 report on Medicare payment policy

CMS MedPAC; 3/15/24

Washington, DC, March 15, 2024—Today, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) releases its March 2024 Report to the Congress: Medicare Payment Policy. The report presents MedPAC's recommendations for updating provider payment rates in traditional fee-for-service (FFS) Medicare for 2025 and for providing additional resources to acute care hospitals and clinicians who furnish care to Medicare beneficiaries with low incomes. ... MedPAC recommends ... eliminating the payment update for hospice providers; and payment reductions for three post-acute care sectors (skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and inpatient rehabilitation facilities).

Editor's Note: Click here to download this report's "Chapter 9: Hospice Services"

Hospice Provider News

What's not talked about in healthcare enough?

Becker's Health IT, by Naomi Diaz; 3/14/24

In the rapidly evolving landscape of healthcare technology, industry leaders express a common concern: the overshadowing of fundamental practices by the allure of cutting-edge innovations. *Becker's* asked seven hospital and health system leaders at the HIMSS 2024 annual meeting: What's something in healthcare or the health tech space that is not talked about enough?

Telehealth study investigates reimbursements for rural health care delivery

Medical Xpress, by Vincent Jacobbi, Mayo Clinic; 3/15/24

A recent Mayo Clinic study published in the American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine investigated how telehealth in palliative care may provide value for rural caregivers, health care teams and their patients. Researchers were particularly interested in determining what billing models were most cost-effective and sustainable for health care teams and caregivers transitioning patients from hospital to home care.



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Hospices stepping up performance on visits-in-last-days-of-life measure

Hospice News, by Jim Parker; 3/14/24

Hospices, in aggregate, are showing improvement on the quality measure for visits in the last days of life. The number of registered nurse and social worker visits during a patient's final week is one of the seven quality measures that CMS uses to evaluate providers. In Calendar Year 2021, the share of hospice care days with nurse visits in the last seven days of life rose to 63%, up from 62% year over year, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).

Notable mentions: Sarah Simmons, NHPCO; Patrick Harrison, NHPCO.

Healthcare workers' mental well-being among ECRI's top patient safety concerns

Becker's Behavioral Health, by Rylee Wilson; 3/14/24

The mental and physical well-being of the workforce is one of the ECRI's top 10 patient safety concerns for 2024. The nonprofit organization published its annual list detailing the biggest threats to patient safety March 12. "Rampant physical and emotional exhaustion" has led some healthcare workers to leave the workforce, creating stress on those who remain and possibly threatening patient care, according to ECRI's report.

CHI Memorial awards nonprofit grants [\$80k to Home of Chattanooga]

Hamilton County Herald; 3/15/24

... Welcome Home of Chattanooga, which provides hospice and respite care to marginalized populations, received \$80,852 to expand its social services, access to mental health treatment and nutritional support.



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Palliative Care Provider News

Expanding horizons: New palliative care services introduced in Valparaiso

ABNewswire; 3/14/24

South Valparaiso Immediate & Urgent Care Clinic is proud to announce the expansion of its healthcare services with the introduction of comprehensive palliative care. ... The South Valparaiso palliative care team consists of highly skilled professionals, including physicians, nurses, social workers, and chaplains, who work collaboratively to develop personalized care plans for each patient.

Clinical News

Sylvester researchers, collaborators call for greater investment in bereavement care

NewsWise, by Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center; 3/15/24

The public health toll from bereavement is well-documented in the medical literature, with bereaved persons at greater risk for many adverse outcomes, including mental health challenges, decreased quality of life, health care neglect, cancer, heart disease, suicide, and death. ... Wendy G. Lichtenthal, PhD, FT, FAPOS, who is Founding Director of the new [Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer] Center and associate professor of public health sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, noted, "We need a paradigm shift in how healthcare professionals, institutions, and systems view bereavement care. Sylvester is leading the way by investing in the establishment of this Center, which is the first to focus on bringing the transitional bereavement care model to life."

Beautiful people: Busy 14-year-old still finds time to volunteer for local hospice [creating legacy books]

10 Tampa Bay; by Jenny Dean; 3/14/24

Kyla Logan creates beautiful legacy books for families facing the end of life. ... "...people can write all about themselves in it. So like their name, birthday, where they were born, favorite things to do, what their life was like really. It kind of gives their families a little bit of a reminder of 'oh yeah this person lived such an interesting life that it's a good thing that we have this'," Logan explained.



Breast cancer palliative care and metastatic disease: Looking beyond end of life

MedPage Today, by Shalmali Pal; 3/15/24

... It is important to inform patients that they can receive palliative care [at any time opens in a new tab or window](#) during their treatment, from the time of diagnosis to end of life. ... At some juncture, the options for metastatic breast

cancer treatment become limited. Progression can be classified into four general types:

- Smoldering ...
- Gradual ...
- Rapid ...
- De novo poor condition ...

Music Therapy to facilitate Relationship Completion at the end of life: A mixed-methods study

Journal of Music Therapy; by Fu-Nien Hsie, Helen Shoemark, Wendy L Magee; 3/14/24

The concept of relationship completion is embodied as the core belief for end-of-life care in Taiwan, known as the Four Expressions in Life. ... Four themes around opportunities emerged from the interviews: the opportunity for exploration, for connection, for expression, and for healing. The integrated findings suggest that music therapy facilitated relationship completion and improved quality of life for both patients and their families. Furthermore, this study supports that the transformative level of music therapy practice within a single session for end-of-life care is attainable.

Preventing adverse drug events in hospice care

Hospice News, by Holly Vossel; 3/15/24

Documentation errors and a fragmented health system pose the greatest risks for adverse drug events among hospices. ... Evaluating these risks involves having solid medication reconciliation processes in place — both at the time of a patient's admission and throughout their end-of life care experience, according to Mary Lynn McPherson, professor and executive program director of advanced post-graduate education in palliative care at the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy. McPherson also serves on the board of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine (AAHPM).



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Clinician perspectives on integrating neuro-oncology and palliative care for patients with high-grade glioma

Oxford Academic Neuro-Oncology Practice; by Rita C Crooms, MD MPH; Jeannys F Nnemnbeng, MD MS RRT; Jennie W Taylor, MD MPH; Nathan E Goldstein, MD; Ksenia Gorbenko, PhD; Barbara G Vickrey, MD MPH; 3/14/24

Background/objectives: Patients with high-grade glioma have high palliative care needs, yet few receive palliative care consultation. This study aims to explore themes on 1) benefits of primary (delivered by neuro-oncologists) and specialty (SPC) palliative care and 2) barriers to SPC referral, according to a diverse sample of clinicians.

We Honor Veterans: Examples and resources from partners

NHPCO; 3/14/24

This webpage has been designated for partners to share any resources they created to share with others. Includes:

- Educational Presentations
- Veteran Resource Guides
- Community Presentations
- VA Fact Sheets for Level 5
- Annual Reports for Level 5
- Honoring Veterans Examples (all levels)

If you have any resources to share please email veterans@nhpco.org.

Regulatory News

Care Alternatives, whistleblowers resolve hospice fraud suit

Bloomberg Law, by Daniel Seiden; 3/15/24

- Four whistleblowers filed False Claims Act suit in 2008
- Case dismissed, reinstated by Third Circuit in Aug. 2023

Care Alternatives Inc. and four whistleblowers have asked a federal district court to dismiss a 16-year-old False Claims Act suit alleging that the company defrauded Medicare by providing hospice care to patients who weren't eligible.

When Medicaid comes after the family home

The New York Times, by Paula Span; 3/16/24

Federal law requires states to seek reimbursement from the assets, usually home, of people who died after receiving benefits for long-term care. ... The letter came from the state department of human services ... It expressed condolences for the loss of the recipient's mother, who had died a few weeks earlier at 88. ...

Medicaid estate recovery means surviving family members may have to sell the home of a loved one to repay Medicaid, or the state may seize the property.

Editor's Note: Please share this article with your hospice bereavement counselors.

(Access might be limited, per NYT subscriptions.)

Mergers & Acquisition News

Vitas CEO Westfall: Market conditions more favorable for hospice acquisitions

Hospice News, by Jim Parker; 3/15/24

Changes in the marketplace have made further acquisitions by Vitas Healthcare more likely. Vitas, a subsidiary of Chemed Corp. ..., recently announced its first deal in several years, the \$85 million purchase of hospice assets from Covenant Health. While the company does not comment on its specific acquisition plans or its pipeline, Vitas may be more active in the M&A space in the coming year, CEO Nick Westfall indicated ...

The identity dilemma: Navigating rebranding decisions in home health M&A

Home Health Care News, by Patrick Filbin; 3/14/24

... While some companies swiftly integrate acquired businesses into their brand

and splash their logo, marketing materials and likeness on the newly acquired assets, others opt to maintain the selling company's identity. In home-based care, the decision to "rebrand or retain" takes into account a number of factors, sources told Home Health Care News. They include operational efficiency, patient/client retention, market positioning and more.

Post-Acute Care News

Specialized nursing facility clinicians improve end-of-life care

Cornell Chronicle, by Marijke Vroomen Durning, Weill Cornell Medicine; 3/15/24

Specialized nursing facility clinicians, or SNFists, may decrease the likelihood of nursing home residents experiencing stressful hospitalizations and improve the quality of life in their last days, according to researchers from Weill Cornell Medicine. The paper, published March 15 in JAMA Network Open, examined how SNFists uniquely impacted the care of nursing home residents in their last 90 days, compared with those cared for by other clinicians. This large-scale study is the first of its kind.

The 19 rural emergency hospitals, by state

Becker's Hospital CFO Report, by Andrew Cass, 3/15/24

Nineteen hospitals have converted to the rural emergency designation since the law that created the designation took [effect](#) in January 2023, according to [data](#) from University of North Carolina's Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research in Chapel Hill. Here are the hospitals that have converted to rural emergency status, by state: ... [Click on the title's link to view]

Institutional efforts to address legacies of slavery—Implications for the health care system

JAMA Health Forum; by Sara N. Bleich, PhD; Jose F. Figueroa, MD, MPH; Martha Minow, JD; 3/14/24

... Health care systems across the country are increasing their efforts to help address structural racism. For example, the Healthcare Anchor Network (HAN), which launched in 2017, includes 40 health systems in 45 states and Washington, DC, that have committed to address structural racism and the corresponding public health disparities. HAN aims to improve community health by leveraging key assets such as hiring, purchasing, and place-based investment strategies.

Technology / Innovations News

Hines VA introduces new monitoring system for hospice and nursing home Veterans

VA Press Release; 3/15/24

Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital has begun integrating a new patient monitoring system to improve Veteran health and assist medical staff. The AvaSure© Continuous Video Monitoring System places portable cameras in patients' rooms who may need closer monitoring. Staff can observe up to 15 patients simultaneously through a virtual interface to monitor for issues such as a patient out of bed or patient-caused medical device interference. ... The monitoring system will be used in Hines VA's Community Living Center (CLC), which includes short- and long-term nursing home care and hospice.

HIMSS24: Change Healthcare outage is the elephant in the room

Modern Healthcare - Digital Health, by Brock E.W. Turner; 3/14/24

There's certainly buzz about the Change Healthcare data breach at the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society's annual conference. But getting executives to talk openly about it is a non-starter. The breach, which has hobbled systems nationwide, has put even greater emphasis on the topics of cybersecurity and protecting patient data. But many attendees at the event in Orlando, Florida, have been unwilling to discuss it on the record, citing their relationship with the claims processing company owned by UnitedHealth Group.

General News

Most Americans would rather feel 25% healthier than live 25% longer. Here's how to lengthen your health span

Fortune Well, by Alexa Mikhail; 3/15/24

Across all generations, more Americans would choose to feel 25% healthier than live 25% longer. Broken down, 60% of Gen Z and millennials say they would choose to feel healthier rather than live longer as compared to 67% of Gen X and 70% of Boomers, according to a consumer trends report from The New Consumer in partnership with Coefficient Capital. Only 15% of Boomers, 22% of Gen X, and about a third of Gen Z and millennials say they would rather live 25% longer.

Today's Encouragement

Today's Encouragement: You think winter will never end, and then, when you don't expect it, when you have almost forgotten it, warmth comes and a different light." — Wendell Berry

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