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From: Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter
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Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 4:00 AM
To: Cordt Kassner
Subject: Your Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter for 03/19/24

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Hospice Provider News

Should the DOJ break up UnitedHealth Group?

MedCity News, by Marissa Plescia; 3/17/24

The U.S. Department of Justice has reportedly recently launched an antitrust investigation of UnitedHealth Group, which begs the question of whether the healthcare giant should be broken up. Experts have varying opinions.

COLUMN: March is National Social Workers Month

The Andalusia Star News; by Vicki C. Wacaster; 3/16/24

In recognition of National Social Workers Month in March 2024, we wish to honor and recognize the vital gifts of dedication, love, professionalism, time, talent, and care Hospice Social Workers provide. ... Hospice social workers often perform the following tasks:

- Help families make healthcare choices that are best suited for the patient
- Liaison with patients and other medical professionals
- Document the patient's wishes and needs accurately
- Contact agencies and speak on behalf of patients and their families for additional resources
- Help resolve psychological crises when needed

- Intervene and help resolve conflicts between families and caregivers if needed
- Help with medical insurance forms
- Assist families with funeral planning if needed
- Provide family and caregiver grief counseling for up to 13 months after the passing of their loved one

Palliative Care Provider News

Palliative Care as ‘Personalized Medicine’

Hospice News, by Jim Parker; 3/18/24

The term “personalized medicine” is often used to describe health needs based on a patient’s genetics. However, more stakeholders are applying the term to palliative care. Personalized medicine is a step away from a “one-size-fits-all” approach to health care. The model uses information gathered from a patient’s genome to plan for care, treatment and services, and to some extent, predict a likely health trajectory, according to the National Human Genome Research Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health.



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Clinical News

Tensions between grieving hearts and Western mind: Brave spaces for grief literacy and mystical experiences

Psychology Today, Mark Shelvock RP(Q), CT, MACP, MA; reviewed by Davia Sills; post co-authored with Jodi Gorham; 3/15/24

Key Points:

- There is a lack of grief and death literacy occurring across the modern world.
- It can be even harder to share about mystical experiences associated with death when grief itself is taboo.

- Openly discussing the intersections between grief, death, and mystical experiences can benefit many.

Hospice prepares to thank Vietnam era vets

Mid Hudson News; 3/17/24

In early 2017, Congress passed the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act, establishing March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. The holiday is also known as “Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day” and in honor of those who served during the Vietnam era, the Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties will host its fourth annual “Thank You” and Memorial Ceremony on March 29 at 10 a.m. at the Cornwall Yacht Club. Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties is a community partner of “We Honor Veterans,” a campaign developed by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Editor's Note: Click here for information about [March 29th, National Vietnam War Veterans Day](#).

How a Florida woman’s NYC selfie led to her brain tumor diagnosis

New York Post, by Chris Harris; 3/16/24

It was a life-changing selfie. ... “I looked at the picture, and my eyelid was drooping,” Troutwine recalled. “I thought it was odd, so when I returned home, I mentioned it to my neurologist.” The doctor ordered an MRI, and on her way home from the scan, she got a call: They had found a benign mass inside her brain that was growing at an aggressive rate.



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Regulatory News

Accountable Care Organization leader perspectives on the Medicare shared savings program - A qualitative study

JAMA Network; by Dhruv Khullar, MD, MPP; William L. Schpero, PhD; Lawrence P. Casalino, MD, PhD; et al; 3/15/24

In this qualitative study of 49 ACOs, leaders identified a focus on wellness visits, coding practices, and care transitions, and described using quality dashboards, personal relationships, and shared savings distributions to engage clinicians. Competition from Medicare Advantage presented a growing challenge for recruitment and retention of patients and practices, and some leaders of hospital-associated ACOs reported misaligned incentives.

Dual eligibles, PACE expansion bill draws bipartisan support, industry endorsements

McKnights Home Care, by Adam Healy; 3/18/24

A bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation that would improve care coordination for dual-eligible beneficiaries and expand the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly to a larger share of people. The legislation's primary function would be to require every state to develop a comprehensive, integrated health plan for dual-eligible beneficiaries, according to a summary. The bill also would require every state to allow PACE programs to be established, open up enrollment to any time in a given month, and extend PACE coverage to people under 55 years of age.

Mergers & Acquisition News

[UPDATED] Skilled Nursing giant PACS Group files for IPO as it looks to expand footprint

Skilled Nursing News, by Zahida Siddiqi; 3/14/24

PACS Group filed for an initial public offering with the Securities and Exchange Commission on Wednesday, citing focus on growth plans in its filing. ... The Farmington, Utah-based PACS Group is one of the largest skilled nursing providers with more than 200 nursing facilities across nine states and serves over 20,000 patients daily. It plans to list on the NYSE under the symbol PACS.



Post-Acute Care News

When the American Dream becomes survival: Short doc chronicles rural healthcare crisis

PBS - KET, by Nathan Duke; 3/17/24

Director Ramin Bahrani's acclaimed films ... focus on people struggling to survive due to economic challenges or failing to achieve the mythologized American Dream. His latest, the short documentary *If Dreams Were Lightning: Rural Healthcare Crisis*, is a startling look at the challenges facing rural communities in which hospitals are closing and leaving residents without options for care. The film incorporates themes from Bahrani's previous work, but its subjects' struggles are far from fictional.

Long-term care costs can cripple families with aging loved ones. Turlock has a solution - Opinion

The Modesto Bee, by Jeffrey Lews and Francesca Rinaldo; 3/17/24

The sudden closures of the Brandel Manor nursing home and Cypress Place Assisted Living have left many in Turlock and the surrounding communities wondering where they will find quality care for their loved [ones]. ... The Turlock City Council approved a \$400,000 grant to support the Legacy Health Endowment Person-Centered Care (PCC) program, an innovative initiative offering comprehensive in-home support services for families looking after aging loved ones. The program aims to assist families by providing care while safe guarding against premature placement into a nursing home or the fear of re-hospitalization.

Technology / Innovations News

Use of machine learning to optimize referral for early palliative care: Are prognostic predictions enough?

Journal of Clinical Oncology - Editorials; by Gary E. Weissman, MD, MSHP; Joseph A. Greer, PhD; and Jennifer S. Temel, MD; 3/15/24

The Takeaway

In the article that accompanies this editorial, [Weissman] et al used a machine learning (ML) algorithm to identify patients with advanced cancer who were receiving non-curative-intent treatment and at risk of death within 1 year to allocate early palliative care services at least 6 months before death as a means to increase use of early palliative care in the context of limited resources. While ML prognostic models are one promising strategy for triaging palliative care services, initiation of palliative care based exclusively on estimated survival and in the months before death likely excludes patients who would benefit from early palliative care initiated at the time of diagnosis, regardless of their estimated survival.



UnitedHealth Group cyberattack status update

UnitedHealth Group Press Release; 3/18/24

Today [Monday 3/18/24], Change Healthcare will begin releasing medical claims preparation software, an important step in the resumption of services. This will be made available to thousands of customers over the next several days. The company expects to have third-party attestations available prior to services becoming operational. Following this initial phase, remaining services restoration will continue through ongoing phases of activation until all customers have been connected.

Healthcare hit hardest by ransomware last year, FBI IC3 report shows

HealthITSecurity, by Jill McKeon; 3/12/24

The healthcare sector suffered more ransomware attacks than any other critical infrastructure sector last year, according to complaint data examined in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's 2023 Internet Crime Report. ... In 2023, IC3 received a record 880,418 complaints, with losses exceeding \$12.5 billion. These figures signify a 10 percent increase in complaints received and a 22 percent increase in losses suffered compared to last year's report.

Ethics

Voices of Grief to host workshops for families victimized by funeral home

Pikes Peak Courier, by Pat Hill; 3/18/24

In October, investigators with the Fremont County Sheriff's Office discovered 200 bodies that had not been cremated but rather were improperly stored, many of them for four years. The owners, Jon and Carie Hallford, have been arrested and face 200 felony charges. Of 1,200 families affected, 190 of them were directly impacted. ... [Kathy] Sparnins, [filmmaker and producer of the documentary "Voices of Grief,"] who lives in Woodland Park, was recently contacted by the FBI Victim Advocacy Program to work the families whose deceased loved ones were taken to Return to Nature Funeral Home in Penrose.

Police identify 13 deaths at unlicensed Arlington, Mansfield group homes since 2022

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, by James Hartley; 3/14/24

At least 13 people have died since 2022 under the care of a woman who was running five unlicensed group homes in North Texas, police wrote in a warrant to search one of the homes. ... Regla "Su" Becquer, 49, was arrested Monday and charged with one count of abandoning or endangering an individual creating imminent danger of bodily injury. ... Police have said more charges are expected in their ongoing investigation. Search warrants obtained by the Star-Telegram, written by Detectives Krystallyne Robinson and Devon Coffer, show police believe the abuse was extensive.

General News

Art Ellison has one dying wish: Feed all New Hampshire students

Concord Monitor, by Michaela Towfighi; 3/15/24

Art Ellison isn't one to mince words. With red blanket over his lap and a "support public education" t-shirt on, he has one final request as he rests at the Granite VNA hospice house...

Living a special life to the end

The Daily Sentinel, by Nathan Deal; 3/17/24, updated 3/18/24

"Today's a good day to have a good day. The sun will come up in the east and it will set in the west. All you have to do is match its energy." That was the mantra of Andy Smith, Grand Junction High School and Colorado Mesa University graduate, rugby enthusiast, friend of Coach K, and lover of sunsets and sunrises. It was the outlook he lived by even on his darkest days.

Editor's Note: Read this inspiring story about 22 year old Andy Smith, cared for by HopeWest Hospice in Grand Junction, CO.

Education

Navigating difficult conversations with patients with terminal cancer diagnoses

Oncology Nursing News, by Darlene Dobkowski, MA; 3/18/24

Although oncology nurses need strong communication skills to help all of their patients navigate their cancer journeys, it is critical to have the ability to have difficult conversations with patients who received a terminal diagnosis, ... Betty Ferrell, Ph.D., M.S.N., CHPN, director and professor in the Division of Nursing Research and Education in the Department of Population Sciences at City of Hope in Duarte, California, said in an interview with Oncology Nursing News. For the past 24 years, her institution has been directing a project called the End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC), which is a palliative care training program and includes a module focused on communication. ... "One of the things that we teach nurses is ... that your No. 1 job is to listen," Ferrell said. "Another thing that we say to nurses is, it is not your job to have all the answers. Patients ask very unanswerable questions. 'Why me?' is not an answerable question. But when a patient says, 'Why me,' then we want nurses to have good communication skills to say, 'I can imagine why you're asking that question.

Because as you've shared with me, you had no idea that you might be diagnosed with cancer, or you're the first person in your family to ever have cancer."

What you should—and shouldn't—say to a friend going through a major illness

MSN, by Jenna Ryu; 3/18/24

When a friend receives a life-changing diagnosis, it can be tough to know how to show up for them. ... For instance, you might automatically respond to your buddy's health news with, "I know what you're going through," when really, all you wanted was to be sympathetic. ... So if you're not sure what, exactly, to say to help them feel better, here are five compassionate and respectful phrases that'll let them know you're in their corner.

- "I love you, and I'm here for you." ...
- "I don't exactly know what to say, but I'm thinking of you."
- "I can't imagine how you're feeling, but whatever emotions you're experiencing are perfectly valid."
- "Let me do X for you--how does that sound?"
- "You don't have to say anything."

Editor's Note: Calling hospice and palliative care's all-important non-clinical professionals and volunteers who have not had training in end-of-life communications with patients and families: this article gives gentle, supportive guides for what to say--and not say--to someone going through a serious, life-threatening illness.

Today's Encouragement

The first blooms of spring always make my heart sing. - S. Brown

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