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**HOSPICE &
PALLIATIVE CARE
TODAY**

March 29th, 2024

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Headlines

Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Hospice Payment Rate Update Proposed Rule (CMS-1810-P)

CMS email; 3/28/24

The FY 2025 hospice payment update percentage is 2.6% (an estimated increase of \$705 million in payments from FY 2024). ... The proposed FY 2025 rates for hospices that do not submit the required quality data would be updated by the proposed FY 2025 hospice payment update percentage of 2.6% minus four percentage points, which results in a -1.4% update. ... The proposed hospice cap amount for the 2025 fiscal year is \$34,364.85 (FY 2024 cap amount of \$33,494.01 increased by the FY 2025 hospice payment update percentage of 2.6%). The proposed rule can be viewed at the Federal Register at <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection>.

Hospice & Palliative Care Handbook: Quality, Compliance, and Reimbursement, 4th Edition

McGraw Hill - Access APN; textbook by Tina M. Marrelli and Jennifer Kennedy; 3/28/24
"Hospice & Palliative Care Handbook, Fourth Edition, is an invaluable resource for

timely hospice regulatory and compliance information, documentation, care planning, and case management. It provides clear guidance for hospice managers, clinicians, and interdisciplinary group members. I have utilized Tina Marrelli's home health and hospice handbooks to support training new clinical staff and students for decades and consider these resources to be the gold standard." – Kimberly Skehan, MSN, RN, HCS- D, COS-C, Vice President of Accreditation - Community Health Accreditation Partner

Medicare, Medicaid made \$100B in improper payments in 2023

Becker's Hospital Review - Legal & Regulatory Issues, by Andrew Cass; 3/27/24

The federal government [reported](#) an estimated \$235.8 billion in improper payments in fiscal year 2023, with more than \$100 billion coming from Medicare and Medicaid, according to a March 26 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office. The \$235.8 billion in improper payments reported by 14 agencies across 71 programs is a decrease from the \$247 billion reported in 2022, but the figure remains higher than pre-pandemic levels, according to the report.



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Hospice Provider News

Enhancing interoperability in home health and hospice care

McKnights Home Care, by Tim Smokoff; 3/26/24

In the dynamic realm of home health and hospice care, the seamless flow of information across care settings stands as a crucial element for ensuring quality patient outcomes and efficient workflows. Recent advancements in electronic health record (EHR) solutions within this sector have not only fostered enhanced care-team collaboration, but have also addressed challenges posed by evolving reimbursement models and workforce shortages.

How sales and marketing compensation can get hospices into hot water

Hospice News, by Holly Vossel; 3/27/24

Regulators are taking a closer look at how hospices pay their marketing and outreach workforces to curb fraudulent activity tied to referral streams. Federal and state regulatory agencies have systems in place to detect fraud, waste and abuse in hospice, and some are honing on oversight of sales, marketing and outreach staff payment arrangements, according to Ellen Persons, shareholder at Polsinelli Law Firm.

5 C-suite roles talent leaders are watching

Becker's Hospital Review, by Alexis Kayser; 3/21/24

Becker's recently connected with HR and talent executives to learn how their health systems are strengthening leadership pipelines. When asked which leadership roles they expect to focus hiring efforts on in the coming years, these C-suite titles emerged.

1. Chief information officers and cybersecurity executives ...
2. Data analytics and business intelligence executives ...
3. Dual C-suite roles ...
4. Chief population health officers ...
5. Chief clinical officers, chief nursing officers, service line executives ...



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Clinical News

Fall prevention for the elderly: 13 strategies to keep them safe

U.S. News & World Report, by Claire Wolters, ed. by Christine Comizion, MPH; 3/26/24

Falls are the leading cause of injury in adults 65 and older – with reports showing about 14 million adults fall each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ... According to the CDC, falls are also the leading cause of injury-related death in the 65-and-older population – and the fall death rate is growing. Here's what to know about what increases risk for falls in older adults, and get familiar with fall prevention tips and safety measures that can help reduce the risk.

Editor's Note: This U.S. News article primes the pump. Preventing falls matters especially for vulnerable hospice patients as their disease progresses, and as they and/or family want the person to be as mobile as possible. What do your Incident Reports tell you about falls? What falls-specific education do you provide for your interdisciplinary teams? On-call staff? Family caregivers? Volunteers? What QAPI programs have addressed falls?

Antibiotics in end-of-life care

NEJM Journal Watch, by Abigail Zuger, MD; 3/27/24

Antibiotics often are considered to be among the gentler and more comfort-oriented interventions in end-of-life care, certainly far less aggressive than intubation or last-ditch surgery. ... Still, antibiotics do entail their own costs in the form of toxicities and need for intravenous access, and liberal antibiotic use reliably worsens institutional and community drug-resistance profiles. ... A new review was written for infectious disease consultants but contains specific suggestions that should interest both generalists and other subspecialists caring for dying patients.

From doctor to family: Witnessing both sides of end-of-life care

MedPage Today's KevinMD.com, by Jessica Bloom, MD; 3/27/24

We all have those moments in medicine when we know that care has become more futile. Then we do everything in our power to educate, support, gently guide, and give permission to patients and families. There are moments that treating for a cure goes against our tenet to “first do no harm.” ... Specialists and his regular physicians sat with us, listened to my family’s questions, and offered kindness along with medical advice. They gently helped my siblings let go of futile searching for treatments. ...



Mergers & Aquisition News

M&A volume may shift from hospice to home health

Hospice News, by Jim Parker, 3/26/24

Though many expect a hospice M&A rebound in 2024, the scales are tipping in

favor of home health companies among buyers. Generally, signs point to heightened buyer activity this year, particularly among private equity as interest rates start to come down.

Steward to sell 'highly desired' physician group to Optum

Becker's Hospital CFO Report, by Alan Condon; 3/27/24

Dallas-based Steward Health Care plans to sell its physician group to UnitedHealth Group's subsidiary Optum, *The Boston Globe* reported March 26. The proposed sale of Stewardship Health is part of the 33-hospital system's plan to shore up its finances amid ongoing challenges, including falling behind in paying bills and rents. If approved, physicians who work at Steward facilities across nine states would be employed by Optum, the largest employer of physicians in the U.S.

Post-Acute Care News

Bon Secours Mercy Health posts \$123.9M operating loss; new CFO to begin July 1

Becker's Hospital CFO Report, by Alan Condon; 3/26/24

Cincinnati-based Bon Secours Mercy Health reported a \$123.9 million operating loss (-1% margin) in 2023, improving on the \$323.5 million operating loss (-2.9% margin) in 2022, according to financial documents published March 25. ... Agency costs declined from \$504.1 million in 2022 to \$256.2 million in 2023. ... Debbie Bloomfield, PhD, will retire as CFO at the end of 2024 after more than three decades with the health system. She will begin transitioning from her CFO role on July 1 and shift to financial leadership oversight of the system's subsidiaries. Travis Crum, senior vice president of finance, will take over as CFO on July 1.



4 ways to drive transformational change in sustainability

American Hospital Association; 3/26/24

Like a growing number of health care organizations, New Jersey's Hackensack Meridian Health (HMH) system has been on a journey for some time now to reduce its environmental impact and boost sustainability practices. Recent achievements include:

- Investing more than \$116 million in energy-efficient upgrades
- Purchasing 99% of furnishings free of harmful chemicals.
- Ensuring that all the electronics it purchased in 2022 were EPEAT-certified
- ...
- Saving more than \$1.7 million by reprocessing medical devices ...

4 Ways CEOs Can Drive Transformational Change: [listed] ...

Editor's Note: New Jersey's Hackensack Meridian Health System provides [hospice care](#) and [palliative care](#).

Technology / Innovations News

How healthcare AI is regulated by the FDA, HHS, state laws

Modern Healthcare, by Gabriel Perna; 3/26/24

Widespread oversight of artificial intelligence in healthcare is still a work in progress but that doesn't mean the technology is completely unregulated. ... There are areas where developers, providers and insurers are regulated in how they use AI. Federal agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and Health and Human Services Department have some oversight authority. Also, a few states have enacted laws governing use of AI within clinical care.

UnitedHealth urges Change customers to reconnect to restored systems

Modern Healthcare, by Lauren Berryman; 3/28/24

UnitedHealth group is calling on more health insurance companies to utilize the Change Healthcare systems it has already restored and bring the healthcare system closer to normalcy. The company, which operates Change Healthcare through its Optum subsidiary, is processing claims through its restored Assurance software and has reactivated its Relay Exchange clearinghouse, for

example. But UnitedHealth Group needs more insurers to reconnect, it said in a notice on its website Wednesday.

Disruptions to endure even as Change Healthcare fixes systems

Modern Healthcare, by Lauren Berryman; 3/28/24

Providers and health insurance companies see a long road ahead that stretches past whenever UnitedHealth Group declares Change Healthcare is fixed. Full restoration of claims, billing and other processes won't mark the end of the mess that began with a cyberattack last month, which forced UnitedHealth Group to take Change Healthcare systems offline and plunged the healthcare sector into disarray. Healthcare organizations anticipate operational and financial effects even when Change Healthcare is up and running again.

Ethics

Expanding the use of continuous sedation until death and physician-assisted suicide

The Journal of Medicine & Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine; by Samuel H Lipuma and Joseph P Demarco; 3/27/24

The controversy over the equivalence of continuous sedation until death (CSD) and physician-assisted suicide/euthanasia (PAS/E) provides an opportunity to focus on a significant extended use of CSD.

General News

Hospice nurse plays instrumental role in patient's joy

City Sun Times, by Lin Sue Flood; 3/27/24

You see it at every symphony performance - people so enraptured by the music that their eyes close and their fingers dance in the air. Stuart Brown is one of those people. But as illness began to limit his mobility, the 81-year-old relinquished the thought of ever attending a live concert again. That's when his Hospice of the Valley nurse secretly reached out to the Phoenix Symphony with a request to hold a small private concert in his Scottsdale home. "We absolutely can make this happen for him and his family," said Valerie Bontrager, director of community engagement.

Editor's Note: Need some inspiration? Read this heart-warming story.



TURNING DATA INTO INFORMATION – TO IMPROVE PATIENT CARE

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20 states facing acute nursing shortages

Becker's Hospital Review, by Kelly Gooch; 3/25/24

... On March 1, Medical Solutions, a healthcare staffing company, released the 20 states where nurses are needed the most based on the most current nurse-to-state population ratios and projected need by 2030. Ratios in the report were from Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics data published in *NurseJournal*. Projected need by 2030 is from Projections Central, a site sponsored by the Labor Department. Here are the 20 states where nurses are needed the most, per the Medical Solutions article: ...

Home care unionization efforts beginning to tick back up

Home Health Care News, by Andrew Donlan; 3/25/24

The home care workforce has traditionally been a tough one to organize. But efforts have ramped up over recent years, leading to more workers opting into unions across the country. Recently, University of Rochester Medicine Home Care (URMHC) workers “overwhelmingly” chose to join a labor union. They aligned themselves with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, which is one of the largest health care worker unions in the country.

Home care providers' creative benefit packages are paying off

Home Health Care News, by Joyce Famakinwa; 3/26/24

... Amid a persistently challenging labor market, home care companies are still constantly working on configuring the best possible employee benefits package for caregivers. Companies like Right at Home San Gabriel Valley, Devoted Guardians and Family Tree Private Care have emerged as standouts when it comes to crafting impressive benefits packages. ...

Connecticut Appellate Court rules employer could discharge medical marijuana user impaired on the job

The National Law Review; by John G. Stretton, Nicole S. Mulé, Zachary V. Zagger of Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C.; 3/27/24

On March 19, 2024, the Connecticut Appellate Court upheld an employer's right to discharge an employee for being impaired on the job from medical marijuana under a state law that provides employment protections for qualified medical marijuana users.

Education

Bayada invests \$375,000 to train future nurses in Pima County

Bayada Communications, 3/26/24

Bayada Home Health Care, a nonprofit, global leader in home health care has granted \$375,000 to fund nursing education for at least 15 students in Pima County. Tucson's Bayada Skilled Nursing office ... is partnering with JobPath, a local nonprofit, to support students pursuing Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) or Registered Nurse (RN) certifications in the greater Tucson area. The grant to JobPath ... will help cover program tuition, books, and other expenses to support those who might otherwise not be able to afford nursing education.

Other News

Other Business Headlines of Interest, updated 3/28/24 per nasdaq.com

- [Adus HomeCare \(ADUS: \\$103.34\)](#)
- [Amedisys \(AMED: \\$92.16\)](#)

- [BrightSpring Health \(BTSG: \\$10.87\)](#)
- [Encompass \(EHC: \\$82.60\)](#)
- [Enhabit \(EHAB: \\$11.65\)](#)
- [Ensign Group \(ENSG: \\$124.42\)](#)
- [HCA Healthcare \(HCA: \\$333.40\)](#)
- [Humana \(HUM: \\$346.65\)](#)
- [Pennant Group \(PNTG: \\$19.63\)](#)

- [Vitas / Chemed Corp \(CHE: \\$642.32\)](#)

Today's Encouragement

The absolute heart of loyalty is to value those people who tell you the truth, not just those people who tell you what you want to hear. In fact, you should value them most. Because they have paid you the compliment of leveling with you and assuming you can handle it. - Pat Summitt, Head Coach, University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers (1974-2012)

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