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From: Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter
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Sent: Monday, April 8, 2024 4:00 AM
To: Cordt Kassner
Subject: Your Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter for 04/08/24

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**HOSPICE &
PALLIATIVE CARE
TODAY**

April 8th, 2024

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Headlines

Medicare Program; FY 2025 Hospice Wage Index and Payment Rate Update, Hospice Conditions of Participation Updates, and Hospice Quality Reporting Program Requirements

Federal Register; A Proposed Rule by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on 4/4/24

This document has a comment period that ends in 53 days, 5/28/24.

This proposed rule would update the hospice wage index, payment rates, and aggregate cap amount for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. This rule proposes changes to the Hospice Quality Reporting Program. This rule also proposes to adopt the most recent Office of Management and Budget statistical area delineations, which would change the hospice wage index. This rule proposes to clarify current

policy related to the “election statement” and the “notice of election”, as well as to add clarifying language regarding hospice certification. Finally, this rulemaking solicits comments regarding potential implementation of a separate payment mechanism to account for high intensity palliative care services.

CMS: Contract Year 2025 Medicare Advantage and Part D Final Rule (CMS-4205-F)

CMS, Medicare Part D, Policy; 4/4/24

On April 4, 2024, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a final rule that revises the Medicare Advantage Program, Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Program (Medicare Part D), Medicare Cost Plan Program, Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), and Health Information Technology Standards and Implementation Specifications. Additionally, this final rule addresses several key provisions that remain from the CY 2024 Medicare Advantage and Part D proposed rule, CMS-4201-P, published on December 14, 2022. ... This fact sheet discusses the major provisions of the 2025 final rule which can be downloaded here: <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2024-07105/medicare-program-medicare-advantage-and-the-medicare-prescription-drug-benefit-program-for-contract>

Hospice Provider News

Proposed hospice rule offers key quality improvement changes, experts offer

McKnights Home Care, by Adam Healy; 4/4/24

While the recently proposed 2025 hospice payment update included a payment adjustment that stakeholders have perceived as inadequate, it also introduced valuable new tools to address hospice quality and more, according to industry regulatory experts. One of the [proposed rule's](#) most enticing features is the Hospice Outcomes and Patient Evaluation (HOPE) tool, which next year will replace the current Hospice Item Set (HIS) measurement system used by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to track hospice quality.



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It's past time for an upgrade to the Medicare Hospice Benefit

Health Affairs, by Cara L. Wallace and Stephanie P. Wladkowski; 4/5/24

When most people think about hospice care, they imagine someone such as the late Rosalynn Carter, who enrolled onto hospice and died within a few days. Jimmy Carter's long hospice stay, now more than a year, has shown a different model for hospice—one that supports its mission to help people live well, with dignity and quality of life, for whatever time remains. However, current policy restrictions to enroll and remain on hospice make it difficult for many hospice recipients to receive hospice care for "whatever time remains," as 17.2 percent of Medicare hospice patients are discharged alive.

Editor's Note: Many hospices used Jimmy Carter's one-year anniversary as a marketing tool that hospice is not really for the "dying." Many--if not most--of these articles were not transparent in identifying any type of recertification, decertification, or revocation processes. Yes, while it may be past time for CMS to upgrade the Hospice Benefit, it's also past time for hospice marketing to be more transparent with the public.

Study shows strong social ties may ease the way for older adults in life's final chapter

Medical & Life Sciences, by Vijay Kumar Maleus; 4/4/24

Study Results: ... The analysis revealed that higher levels of loneliness were significantly associated with increased odds of experiencing anxiety, sadness, and pain in the last month of life, suggesting a pivotal link between social isolation and end-of-life symptomatology. Furthermore, marital status and the receipt of personal care were predictors of dying in a hospital, pointing to the influence of social support structures on the location of death. Interestingly, a larger social network was correlated with a higher likelihood of receiving hospice or palliative care, highlighting the potential benefits of broader social connections.

Clinical News

Qualitative analysis of initial palliative care consultations in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis

Journal of Pain and Symptom Management; by Christine L Watt, Ian C Smith, Jill Rice, Rebekah Murphy, Ari Breiner, Maria Duff, Danica Nogo, Shirley H Bush, Susan McNeely, Usha Buenger, Belinda Zehrt, Jocelyn Zwicker; 4/2/24, online ahead of print

Background: Palliative care (PC) benefits patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), however the needs of patients and caregivers and the optimal timing of PC discussions remains unclear. This study reports the analysis of PC consult notes from a larger feasibility trial. The specific aims of this analysis were to i) identify the PC needs of patients with ALS via qualitative analysis and ii) identify characteristics of patients and caregivers that could predict specific PC needs.



Malnutrition, thyroid cancer result in high rates of death among home care, hospice patients, studies finds

McKnights Home Care, by Adam Healy; 4/5/24

Two separate studies analyzing disparities in patients' place of death revealed high death rates related to malnutrition and thyroid cancer among patients receiving care at home and in hospice. The first study, "Disparities in Place of Death Among Malnourished Individuals in the United States," found that more than 31,000 malnutrition-related deaths occurred among home care and hospice patients between 1999 and 2020. ... Another study, "Disparities in the Place of Death for Patients With Malignant Neoplasms of the Thyroid Gland," discovered that roughly half of all patients who died of thyroid cancer between 1999 and 2020 did so in home care or hospice.

The iconic stethoscope is getting a 21st century makeover

Managed Healthcare Executive, by Peter Wehrwein; 4/4/24

Two years ago, a pair of New Zealand physicians wrote an opinion piece in a peer-reviewed journal of the Royal Australasian of Physicians about point-of-care

ultrasound. The gist of their argument was that ultrasound ought to be used more routinely to detect various heart and lung conditions. The somewhat cheeky title of that article is "Update on Echocardiography: Do We Still Need a Stethoscope?" Jason Bellet has spent more than a decade making pretty much the opposite case: Not only do healthcare professionals still need a stethoscope, they need a vastly improved, 21st century version that harnesses digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI).

Medical marijuana laws benefit patients without harming public mental health, study finds

ScienceBlog, University of Basel; 4/4/24

A study by researchers at the University of Basel has found that the approval of marijuana for medical use in the United States has had little impact on the mental health of the general population, while benefiting those for whom it is intended. The study, which analyzed data from nearly eight million people, sheds light on the ongoing debate surrounding the effects of marijuana legalization on public well-being and its therapeutic value.



Incorporating bereavement into the continuum of care

Medpage Today, by Charles Bankhead; 4/4/24

... Despite being integral to high-quality, family-centered healthcare, bereavement support often is poorly resourced, even described as the "poor cousin of palliative care." ... To develop a framework for compassionate communities requires shifting bereavement care from "an afterthought to a public health priority," wrote Wendy G. Lichtenthal, PhD, of the University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, and co-authors in *Lancet Public Health*. ... In an ideal setting, bereavement care begins with pre-death grief

education, continues through the dying process and end of life, and transitions into community-based support and psychosocial services, as needed. .. The [continuum of care] model comprises five essential "pillars":

- Preventive bereavement care
- Ownership of bereavement care
- Resource allocation for bereavement care
- "Upskilling" support providers with bereavement education and training
- Evidence-based care

Editor's Note: The CMS Hospice Conditions of Participation, Final Rule 2008 includes the word "bereavement/bereaved" 145 times. Furthermore, §418.3 defines: Bereavement counseling means emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual support and services provided before and after the death of the patient to assist with issues related to grief, loss, and adjustment.

Research News

How a CU biostatistician is helping improve palliative care research

University of Colorado - Anschutz Medical Campus, by Tayler Shaw; 4/3/24

Kathryn Colborn, PhD, MSPH, co-leads the Data, Informatics, and Statistics Core (DISC) of the Palliative Care Research Cooperative Group (PCRC). Each year, an estimated 56.8 million people are in need of palliative care, the World Health Organization said in 2021. ... The need for further research on palliative care is clear — but how can investigators best collect and share their data? ... That's when Kathryn Colborn, PhD, MSPH, enters the conversation.

- The PCRC's evolution ...
- Leading data collection in a major way ...
- Where data and mentorship combine ...

Since its formation, the cooperative group has grown to have more than 600 members and a national network of 220 locations.

Editor's Note: This article also highlights the work of Jean Kutner, who has been the multiple principle investigator (MPI) of the PCRC since its formation.

Mergers & Aquisition News

Kaiser closes Geisinger Health acquisition, forming Risant Health

Modern Healthcare, by Caroline Hudson; 4/2/24

Kaiser Permanente has acquired Geisinger Health and folded it into Risant Health, a new nonprofit formed to create a national value-based care network.



Post-Acute Care News

Living to 100: Making Maryland a 'Blue Zone'

The Baltimore Sun, commentary by Raya Elfadel Kheirbek; 4/5/24

In a bold stride toward redefining the approach to aging, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore signed an executive order in January aimed at expanding access to critical care and services for older Marylanders. ... At the heart of this initiative, dubbed *Longevity Ready Maryland*, is a comprehensive plan that transcends traditional state efforts focused solely on eldercare. Instead, it adopts a holistic, multisector approach that promises a transformative impact and enrichment in every dimension — health, financial security, social connectivity and purposeful living, irrespective of a Marylander's socioeconomic status.

Technology / Innovations News

Telehealth effective in supporting rural caregivers

Hospice News, by Jim Parker; 4/3/24

Palliative care delivered via telehealth is effective at improving access to caregiver support. Moreover, these services can also be cost-effective, recent

research has found. ... “[Technology-enhanced transitional palliative care] is a feasible, low cost and sustainable strategy to enhance [family caregiver] support in rural areas,” researches indicated in the study. “Potential reimbursement mechanisms are available to offset the costs to the health system for providing transitional palliative care to caregivers of patients recently hospitalized.”

USDA Rural Development accepting applications for grants to fund high-speed Internet and digital equipment for rural and tribal communities

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, by Leigh Hallet; 4/4/24

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development invites grant applications for two programs that fund broadband access. The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grant Program helps organizations provide online training, education, and health services. It funds services, training, and equipment to digitally connect people to education, training, and health care resources.

How Large Language Models will improve the patient experience

MedCity News, by Piotr Orzechowski; 4/4/24

An LLM [Large Language Model] is a form of artificial intelligence that can generate human-like text and functions as a form of an input – output machine, according to Stanford Medicine. The input is a text prompt, and the output is represented by a text-based response powered by an algorithm that swiftly sifts through and condenses billions of data points into the most probable answer, based on available information. LLMs bring great potential to help the healthcare industry center care around patients’ needs by improving communication, access, and engagement. However, LLMs also present significant challenges associated with privacy and bias that also must be considered.

Ethics

New documentary explores how Lower Moreland’s Terri Schiavo’s story captured the nation

Delco.Today, by Tracey Romero; 4/3/24

Between Life & Death: Terri Schiavo’s Story, a new documentary about the right-to-die case of Lower Moreland Township native Terri Schiavo is streaming on *Peacock*, writes Brian Brant for *People*. Schiavo who lived in Florida with her husband lived in a persistent vegetative state for 15 years after experiencing

cardiac arrest. The documentary explores the familial legal battle over whether or not Schiavo's feeding tube should be removed.

Chicago area nurse gets 2 years in prison for stealing morphine from sick patients

CBS News TV 2, Chicago; by Acacia Hernandez; 4/4/24

A northwest suburban nurse was sentenced in court on Thursday to two years in federal prison for stealing morphine from her patients, some of whom were terminally ill. Sarah Diamond, 31, of Woodstock, was accused of targeting the most vulnerable, including hospice patients living out their final days. In 2021, she removed liquid morphine from bottles that had been prescribed to at least five hospice patients and replaced it with saline. Prosecutors said she took the medication for her own personal use.

General News

Hospice wedding a declaration of love in the face of medical challenge

Penticton Western News, by Alistair Taylor; 4/4/24

The essence of hospice philosophy – emphasizing the significance of cherishing every moment and embracing life to the fullest – was exemplified by the touching and beautiful wedding of Sean Adelberg and Mary Davidson at Campbell River's Hospice House on Tuesday, April 2. ... "This journey to the altar accompanies Mary's heroic battle with stage 4 Glioblastoma—an incurable brain cancer. Despite the odds, we're seizing this incredible chance to celebrate our love," A delberg said.

Major unions, including SEIU, maintain momentum following 2023 strike upswing

McKnights Long-Term Care News, by Josh Henreckson; 4/5/24

New analysis of US Department of Labor data shows that large unions such as the SEIU were able to leverage heightened labor activity to recruit new workers in 2023. In a year characterized by headline-grabbing strikes across multiple industries, the long-term care sector has not been without its share of labor activity — such as recent strikes organized by the SEIU to demand higher wages. With so many providers' staffing and funding woes poised to remain at the forefront of sector concerns, some experts suggest that unions may be able to gain even more momentum in the months and years ahead.

Optimizing RN responsibilities 'more essential' than staffing hours: study

McKnights Long-Term Care News, by Josh Henreckson; 4/2/24

... [New] analysis suggests that optimizing the role of registered nurses would be an even more effective way of increasing quality of care. Care quality would strongly benefit from an industry-wide focus on the responsibilities of RNs, the study's authors said. Specifically, leaders should more actively differentiate RNs from licensed practical nurses, use a nursing practice model framework to maximize the role of RNs and provide RNs with more education in leadership and geriatric care.

Jamestown Regional Medical Center employees give over \$36K to medical center's mission

The Jamestown Sun; 4/4/24

Jamestown Regional Medical Center employees came together this year to raise over \$36,000 through the annual Employee Giving Campaign. The funds raised go directly to the JRMC Foundation, which benefits the community through new equipment, staff training and patient comfort items. Donations support cancer care, hospice, equipment and technology, infant loss and bereavement, Family BirthPlace, the Employee Support Fund, Kala's Korner and the Greater JRMC Fund ...

International News

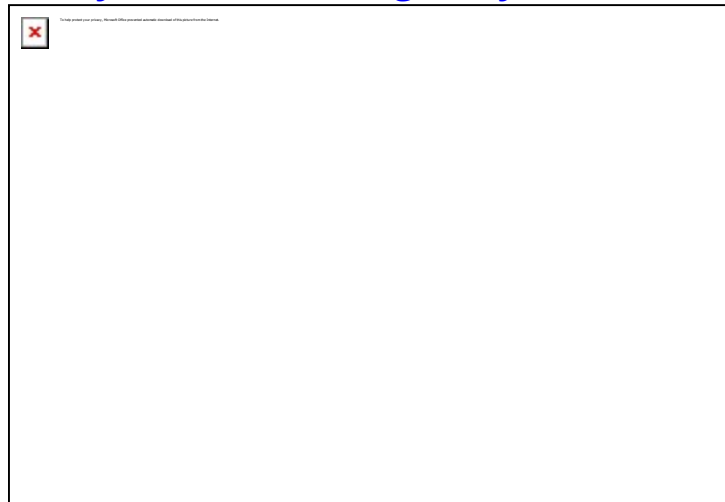
In the spirit of Ramadan: Diverse access to palliative care

Medscape UK, by Dr. Mohammed Sattar; 4/4/24

St. Gemma's Hospice hosted their first ever Ramadan community *iftar* in Moortown, Leeds on March 19, with almost 100 guests in attendance. For me, this was a historic moment. This *iftar* was about creating a sense of community. ... [I've] seen the visionary leadership that is provided by St. Gemma's senior team, ... taking careful consideration of what hospice and palliative care services should look like in an ever-changing Leeds population. The team members ask themselves some difficult questions about how to become an inclusive service for all and no faiths. The *iftar*, the sunset meal when Muslims break their daily fast, was a testament to that. ...

Did You Know?

Today's Heartwarming Story



Louisiana ~ Mississippi Hospice & Palliative Care Organization Announcement; 4/7/24

Several LMHPCO Board of Directors and Education Committee members, as well as LMHPCO Staff visited (this past week) with the Angola Hospice Volunteers and their Staff. This was the first such meeting post-COVID. An incredible day with an incredible hospice program and LMHPCO is grateful to Tonia Faust (the Angola Hospice Nurse/Volunteer Coordinator and an LMHPCO Education Committee Member) for making this visit possible.

Today's Encouragement

Everybody on a championship team doesn't get publicity, but everyone can say they are a champion. - Magic Johnson

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