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From: Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter
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Sent: Friday, April 19, 2024 4:00 AM
To: Cordt Kassner
Subject: Your Hospice & Palliative Care Today Newsletter for 04/19/24

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HOSPICE &
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TODAY

April 19th, 2024

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Headlines

Summaries: FFY 2025 Hospice, Inpatient Rehabilitation Facility, Skilled-Nursing Facility Medicare Payment Rules

California Hospital Association, 4/17/24

What's happening: Summaries of the hospice wage index, inpatient rehabilitation facility (IRF) prospective payment system (PPS), and skilled-nursing facility (SNF) PPS proposed rules are now available.

What else to know: Comments on the proposed rules are due by May 28.

The members-only summaries, from Health Policy Alternatives, Inc., describe proposals for the post-acute care Medicare prospective payment systems for federal fiscal year 2025: < /p>

- [The IRF summary ...](#)
- [The SNF summary ...](#)
- [The hospice summary ...](#)

Editor Picks

'The Grief Lady:' NC woman uses mother's funeral flowers to create art, help others heal

WRAL TV News, Raleigh, NC; by Heather Leah; 4/18/24

Grief is a journey--and you never know for sure where it'll take you. When Janet Willis' mom passed away from small cell lung cancer in her 70s, Willis said she felt like she lost more than a mother; she lost a piece of herself. The loss launched her on a 100 day journey, creating art with the dried flower petals saved from her mother's funeral and sharing her grief experience with her followers. Each day she created a new piece of art – and each day it's as much a surprise for her as it is for her viewers.

Editor's Note: Do you need a Friday "lift"? Click on the title's link to view this beautiful story, art, and tv news segment.

Hospice Provider News

[Sample] Letter: Hospice workers deserve thanks during Volunteer Appreciation Month

Commonwealth Ripon Press (Ripon, WI), Letter to the Editor by Meredith Schluter; 4/18/24

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month and I want to attest to the incredible impact that caring volunteers make in the lives of others in our community. Compassus Hospice in Neenah is an organization that cares for individuals experiencing life-limiting illnesses. ... From directly interacting with patients and families to working with care team members behind the scenes to help operations run smoothly, [volunteers] provide a vital service. The nationwide impact of hospice volunteers is just as significant. According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Association, volunteers care for more than 1.5 million hospice patients each year, totaling millions of hours of care annually.

Editor's Note: How are you expressing appreciation for your volunteers? This "Letter to the Editor" creates community awareness and provides a call for new volunteers. You have 11 more days to continue April's Volunteer Appreciation Month. What have you done? What more can you do?



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Sponsor of Hospice & Palliative Care Today

Longview Marines honored for helping fellow veterans during their time in hospice care

CBS 19 Tyler, TX; by Alan Kasper and Zak Wellerman; 4/18/24

A Longview hospice took time to recognize some very valuable volunteers Wednesday afternoon. Members of AccentCare Hospice & Palliative Care in Longview honored two Marines Corp. veterans who volunteer their time and help fellow veterans going through hospice care. Vietnam War veterans Jim Jones and Will Haggard have spent the past 12 years as part of a contingent from the Longview Marine Corp League, meaning they help make their last moments better for those in hospice care. ... Pam Fletcher, AccentCare Hospice executive director, said the hospice facility appreciates having volunteers like Jones, Haggard and others.

Hospice choices: VITAS® Healthcare opens in Alabama, expands in Florida Panhandle

Investors Observer, GlobeNewswire via QuoteMedia; 4/17/24

Hospice patients and their families in the Florida Panhandle and areas in Southern Alabama can now access quality end-of-life services with VITAS Healthcare. Starting today, the nation's largest and leading provider of end-of-life care begins accepting referrals and admitting seriously ill patients throughout Tallahassee in Florida and Daphne-Mobile and Dothan in Alabama. ... In March 2024, VITAS entered into an agreement to acquire all hospice operations and an assisted living facility from Covenant Care.

Rock River Hospice and Home receives \$5,000 grant

Shaw Local News Network; 4/18/24

The Do it Best Foundation announced that a \$5,000 grant has been awarded to Rock River Hospice and Home [Sterling, IL]. "Rock River is a regional leader in providing end-of-life care," said Rich Jordan, general manager at the Do it Best warehouse in nearby Dixon. "No one is ever turned away from their services for

their inability to pay, which is why donations and grants are so important. We're honored to support their efforts to treat every patient and their families with dignity and respect."



Stillwater Hospice earns SAGECare credential for LGBTQ+ care

89.1 WBOI News - Fresh Air; by Ella Abbott; 4/18/24

Stillwater Hospice received a platinum level SAGECare credential this week, making it the only hospice agency in Indiana to have received the training-based credential. A SAGECare credential shows that the hospice team has been trained on LGBTQ+ aging cultural competency. Stillwater CEO Leslie Friedel said an advocate from the community reached out to them, recommending they work to get the training in order to create safe, local healthcare. "We started to look into it and it aligned so closely with our values," she said. "One of our core values at Stillwater is inclusivity and we felt like this was a way to really live in our values." Friedel said it's important for hospice staff to understand issues specific to that community because by 2030, experts expect around 7 million LGBTQ+ people 65 or older nationally.

Editor's Note: Pair this with another article in today's newsletter, "LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of cancer because of disparities in modifiable risk factors, ACS says."

Palliative Care Provider News

LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of cancer because of disparities in modifiable risk factors, ACS says

ONS Voice [Oncology Nursing Society]; by Magdalen Millman; 4/18/24

About 7% of the U.S. population identifies as LGBTQ+, but understanding cancer in this population is difficult because surveillance data are limited to national surveys on risk factors and screening, the American Cancer Society (ACS) **observed** in a special section of its Cancer Facts and Figures 2024 report on cancer in the LGBTQ+ community. More than 50% of LGBTQ+ individuals have experienced harassment such as slurs, violence, microaggressions, and sexual

harassment, even in healthcare settings. "One in 6 LGBTQ+ adults, and 1 in 5 transgender adults specifically, avoid health care due to previous discrimination," ACS reported. It's one factor implicated for the disparities affecting LGBTQ+ individuals' access to cancer care, including prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and palliative care.

Editor's Note: [Click here for this site's downloadable pdf, Cancer Facts and Figures 2024, Special Section: Cancer in People Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Gender-nonconforming.](#) Pair this with another article in today's newsletter, "Stillwater Hospice earns SAGECare credential for LGBTQ+ care."

Clinical News

Comparative effectiveness of acupuncture vs massage for relieving pain in patients with advanced cancer

The ASCO Post; by Jun J. Mao, MD, MSCE and Andrew S. Epstein, MD; 4/17/24

... The IMPACT study was conducted at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and regional sites in New York, New Jersey, and Florida to evaluate the long-term comparative effectiveness of acupuncture vs massage for pain in patients with advanced cancer. ... The primary outcome—change in worst pain intensity score from baseline to 26 weeks—was measured using the Brief Pain Inventory (BPI ranging from 0–10; higher numbers indicate worse pain intensity or interference). The secondary outcomes included fatigue, insomnia, and quality of life. ... To use these therapies, it is important to seek credentialed practitioners who have training or experience in working with patients who have cancer.



Regulatory News

Medicaid Access Rule review completed by White House

McKnights Senior Living, by Lois A. Bowers; 4/16/24

A proposed federal rule establishing mandatory quality measures for home- and community-based services and requiring providers to allocate 80% of HCBS payments to direct care worker pay is one step closer to being finalized. The White House Office of Management and Budget's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs has completed its review of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services's so-called Medicaid Access Rule, according to the agency's website.

Public Policy News

Mississippi Capitol sees second day of hundreds rallying for 'full Medicaid expansion now'

Mississippi Today - Legislature; by Bobby Harrison and Geoff Pender; 4/17/24

Hundreds of people rallied at the Mississippi Capitol for a second day Wednesday, urging lawmakers to expand Medicaid to provide health coverage for an estimated 200,000 Mississippians. ... Speakers recounted their struggles with access to affordable health care in Mississippi and chanted for the Legislature to, "Close the coverage gap now," and for "Full Medicaid expansion now." ... [Dr. Randy] Easterling recounted a story of two of his friends diagnosed with similar cancers. One was uninsured and self-employed, and did not get early diagnosis or treatment. He's now in hospice and on death's door. The other friend, with insurance, received an early diagnosis and treatment and is now cancer free.

One-third of West Virginians may soon have a harder time getting health care after lawmakers declined to fully fund Medicaid

Mountain State Spotlight, by Erin Beck; 4/18/24

Across West Virginia, it's already hard for many people to access health care. And unless state lawmakers change the budget they passed last month, it's about to get even more difficult, especially for people who live in the most rural areas and those considered lower income. Starting in July, at the start of the next fiscal year, West Virginia officials will be forced to dramatically cut the state's Medicaid budget. Roughly one-third of the state's population relies on the government health insurance program. ... [Lawmakers] gave the program about \$150 million

less than was needed. ... [Facing] funding problems, state health officials could cut services such as hospice care, ...



'Speak Up & Speak Out,' LeadingAge members head to the Hill on Lobby Day 2024

HomeCare; 4/18/24

Senator Mike Braun (R-IN) joined Katie Smith Sloan, president and CEO of LeadingAge, and hundreds of the association's nonprofit and mission-driven members for the kick-off of annual Lobby Day activities. More than 225 LeadingAge members, who serve older adults and families nationwide in a range of care settings and community types, ... headed to Capitol Hill on Wednesday, April 17 ... [Leading Age members] visited their elected officials in the House and Senate to discuss critical aging services issues to ensure older adults and families can access the care and services they need to age with dignity, including [but not limited to]:

- Expand hospice services to ensure access and caregiver support and fortify the hospice workforce.
- Ensure MA beneficiaries have equitable access to care and services, while also preserving providers' financial viability.

Outlook dims for resolution of eased telehealth payments and rules

McKnights Senior Living, by John O'Connor; 4/16/24

The general consensus was clear during a recent House hearing aimed at addressing the temporary easing of policies and payments: Telehealth as a concept is here to stay. But as a year-end deadline to either reinforce or discard numerous COVID-era stopgap measures approaches, resolution is hardly in reach.

Post-Acute Care News

[Rate growth slows for SNFs, home care](#)

McKnights Senior Living, by Kathleen Steele Gaivin; 4/17/24

Rates for both nursing home care and home healthcare grew more slowly in March than in [February](#), according to Altarum's monthly Health Sector Economic Indicators brief, released Tuesday. Nursing home rates increased by 4%, year over year, compared with 4.4% in February, while rates for home healthcare grew by 3.1%, down from 3.4% in February, George Miller, Altarum fellow and senior researcher, told the *McKnight's Business Daily* on Tuesday.

Technology / Innovations News

[UnitedHealth posts \\$1.4B loss in Q1 following Change cyberattack](#)

Becker's Payer Issues, by Jakob Emerson; 4/16/24

UnitedHealth Group [posted](#) a \$1.4 billion net loss in the first quarter of 2024 following [the sale](#) of its Brazil operations and the unprecedented [cyberattack](#) on its Change Healthcare subsidiary in late February. Despite the losses, the company beat investor expectations and shares rose more than 6% to above \$474, the Wall Street Journal reported. ... To date, the company has provided over \$6 billion in advance payments to providers.

Non-print News

[The Promise and Pitfalls of AI in Medicine: Guest Bob Wachter](#)

GeriPal Podcast, by Eric Widera and Alex Smith, with Bob Wachter; 4/18/24

Our guest today is Bob Wachter, Chair of Medicine at UCSF and author of the [Digital Doctor: Hope, Hype, and Harm at the Dawn of Medicine's Computer Age](#). Bob recently wrote an essay in [JAMA on AI](#) and delivered a [UCSF Grand Rounds](#) on the same topic.

Publisher's note: An interesting exchange. With apologies for the length, this portion of the transcript caught my eye:

Bob: Can we try something a little crazy? You may never have done this on the podcast. You want to try [ChatGPT-4] and see how it does?

Eric: Yeah, let's see it.

Alex: Sure.

Bob: All right. Let's give it a try. I'm connecting. This is GPT-4. "Hi, GPT-4. I'm on a podcast now. And what I want to do is, this is a tough task for you, I'm sure, but I have a patient with a new diagnosis of cancer, and it's actually a 35-year-old woman. She's got a couple of kids. And I'm dreading telling her that she has cancer. I wonder if you could suggest an empathetic conversation that I could have with her that would not sugarcoat the idea that she has cancer, but do it in the most supportive possible way, and taking into account that she's got a family and she's got young kids?"

Alex: Wow.

ChatGPT-4: Certainly, having this conversation requires a great deal of sensitivity and compassion. Here's an approach that balances honesty with empathy. "Hi, patient's name. Thank you for coming in today. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the strength it takes to face uncertainty about our health. I have received the results from your tests, and after a thorough review, it's important that we talk openly about what we've found. We've discovered that you have cancer. I can only imagine how hearing this must feel for you, especially as a parent with young children. This news is overwhelming, and it's okay to feel a mix of emotions. You're not alone in this. My team and I are here for you every step of the way. I want to assure you that there are treatments available, and we'll discuss all your options. It's important--"

Bob: What do you think?

Alex: Wow.

Bob: By the way, I've never done that before. I took it on faith that it will do a decent job. "Wow" is the usual response.

International News

Will Assisted Dying in Europe impact Living With Dignity?

Medscape, by Sara Freeman; 4/17/24

BUDAPEST — Only a handful of European countries have legislation in place that decriminalizes the act of physician-assisted dying for certain patients, such as those who are terminally ill. But in recent months, public debates on the topic have been on the rise. ... This was a topic of discussion at the annual meeting of the 32nd European Congress of Psychiatry (EPA 2024) in a session titled "Psychiatry and Physician-Assisted Dying: Europe — Is Diversity Needed?" [Click on the title's link for summaries about the following countries.]

- British Organizations / United Kingdom ...

- France ...
- Switzerland
- [Mentions of] Australia, Canada, Belgium, United States

Countries Where Physician-Assisted Dying Is Legal: Australia (all states), Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada, Luxembourg, United States (selected states), Spain, Switzerland

Other News

Executive Personnel Changes - 4/19/24

- Hospice of the Foothills welcomes Heidi Wingo as new Executive Director
- Envision Healthcare appoints Jason Owen as President and CEO
- Pathways Hospice names Dr. Michael Towbin as Medical Director
- Carolina Caring names Maria Reese as its new VP of Marketing & Communications
- [Joint Commission taps 4 execs](#) [*Becker's Hospice Review, by Alexis Kayser; 4/12/24*]:
 - Lisa Steininger, named Executive Vice President and CFO ...
 - Elizabeth Mort, MD, named Vice President and Chief Medical Officer ...
 - Andrew Rosen, named Vice President, International ...
 - Kathryn Petrovic, named Vice President for Accreditation and Certification Product development ...

Other Business Headlines of Interest, updated 4/18/24 per nasdaq.com

- Adus HomeCare (ADUS: \$96.60)
- Amedisys (AMED: \$90.78)
- BrightSpring Health (BTSG: \$10.64)
- Encompass (EHC: \$79.81)
- Enhabit (EHAB: \$10.11)
- Ensign Group (ENSG: \$116.98)
- HCA Healthcare (HCA: \$297.00)
- Humana (HUM: \$325.10)

- [Pennant Group \(PNTG: \\$19.89\)](#)
- [Vitas / Chemed Corp \(CHE: \\$585.57\)](#)

Today's Encouragement

Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive that is youer than you. — Dr. Seuss

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