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

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August 4th, 2024

Sunday newsletters focus on headlines and top read stories of the last week (in order) - enjoy!

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Headlines

CMS 2025 Hospice Final Rule: Content and Initial Responses

1. [CMS Fact Sheet] Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Hospice Payment Rate Update Final Rule (CMS-1810-F)

CMS Fact Sheet - Final Rule (CMS-1810-F); 7/30/24

On July 30, 2024, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a final rule (CMS-1810-F) updating Medicare hospice payment rates and the aggregate cap amount, for fiscal year (FY) 2025, in accordance with existing statutory and regulatory requirements.

Editor's Note: This "Fact Sheet" provides the straightforward facts, in CMS's official language (6 pages, PDF). [Click here for the full CMS Federal Register Final Rule, 167 pages, PDF.](#)

2. CMS rolls out 2025 Hospice Final Rule with 2.9% pay increase

Hospice News; by Holly Vossel; 7/30/24

The U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has unveiled its final 2025 hospice rule, which includes a 2.9% increase in per diem payments alongside new quality reporting measures. The increase represents an estimated \$790 million rise in total hospice payments compared to Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. It is also higher than the 2.6% hike that CMS initially proposed.

Editor's Note: See above, #1 for the 6 page PDF "Fact Sheet." [Click here for the full CMS Federal Register Final Rule, 167 pages PDF.](#)

3. **Hospice providers net \$790 million Medicare pay hike in FY 2025**

Bloomberg Law; by Tony Pugh; 7/30/24

- Nearly 6,000 hospice providers treat Medicare patients
- Medicare paid nearly \$24 billion for hospice care in 2022

Medicare payments to hospice providers would increase by \$790 million in fiscal year 2025 under a Biden administration final rule released Tuesday. The rule confirms a 2.9% rate increase from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (RIN 0938-AV29) and also finalizes changes to the Hospice Quality Reporting Program. Hospice providers that don't submit the required quality data would see a payment update of 2.9%, "minus four percentage points, which results in a -1.1% update," the CMS said in a fact sheet.

Editor's Note: This article's tone sounds like hospice providers will make huge amounts of money with this 2.9% pay increase. Keep reading, below.

4. **Hospice community responds to CMS 2025 Hospice Rule**

Hospice News; by Jim Parker; 7/31/24

The U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on Tuesday finalized its 2025 hospice payment rule, but some say that the base rate increase is insufficient in today's environment. ... Stakeholders in the space contend that rate hikes have not kept pace with inflation, rising labor costs and other headwinds in the hospice space, as well as lingering effects of COVID. Some have also indicated that the "insufficient" payment rates are making it more difficult for hospices to compete with other providers when it comes to hiring staff.

Editor's Note : This article voices concerns that are consistent with hospice leaders' ongoing concerns, data, and national trends. How does this 2025 Final Rule impact the services you provide?

5. Stay tuned. We will continue to include related articles as this unfolds, further.

'Green burials' grow in popularity as alternatives to traditional funerals

Planet Detroit; by Erica Hobbs; 7/24/24 |

... [Modern] funeral practices are wreaking havoc on the environment. Bodies are embalmed with toxic chemicals and buried in caskets placed in non-biodegradable vaults that take up increasingly limited space in

cemeteries. According to a Cornell University [study](#), an estimated 4.3 million gallons of embalming fluid, 20 million feet of hardwood, 1.6 million tons of concrete and 64,500 tons of steel are used in American burials yearly. Even cremation — often thought of as a green alternative to burial — requires up to 500 gallons of fuel and releases up to 250 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions, according to a [recent study](#) from the Green Burial Council (GBC). However, for those looking to reduce their carbon footprints even in death, green options, though still relatively rare, are available in Michigan. ... [Click on the title's link to continue reading these descriptions of "green burials."]

Awards and Recognitions: July 2024

We congratulate these honorees and celebrate their contributions to our collective hospice and palliative care mission, vision, and compassionate care throughout our world. Do you know any of these leaders? We encourage you to forward this to them or to find another way to celebrate their success. (We are piloting this as a monthly feature in Hospice & Palliative Care Today.)

Organizations

- [Curantis Solutions received the Great Place To Work Certification for the third year in a row by Great Place to Work and named to the 2024 Fortune Best Workplaces in Texas. Curantis Solutions provides comprehensive electronic health records software for hospice and palliative care providers who provide end-of-life care.](#)
- [Delaware Palliative, a subsidiary of Delaware Hospice, has achieved Joint Commission certification as a community-based palliative care provider, marking a significant milestone as the first organization in Delaware to receive this honor. This is in addition to The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval for Home Care Accreditation across all five of its hospice locations in Delaware and Pennsylvania.](#)

Individuals

- [Judi Lund Person, MPH, CHC, was honored with the Lifetime in Excellence Award by the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation \[NPHI\] for her remarkable advocacy efforts.](#)

- Christy Whitney was awarded the Champion of End-of-Life Care Award by the National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation [NPHI] in recognition of her visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to advancing mission-driven end-of-life care.
- Tina Gentry, MHA, FACHE, CFRE, CLE, Chief Operating & Advancement Officer for Telios Collaborative Network (TCN), recently became a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives, the nation's leading professional society for healthcare leaders.
- Anne, Bash, Community Liaison for Hospice of the Valley, name a "Most Influential Women in Arizona Business 2024."
- Sandra DiScala, PharmD, BCPS, FAAHPM, director of the PGY-2 Pain Management and Palliative Care Pharmacy Residency and as a clinical pharmacist practitioner for pain, palliative care, and geriatrics at the West Palm Beach VA Healthcare System (WPBVAHCS) in Florida, recieved the 2024 Fudin Award for Pain and Palliative Care Mentorship, presented by the Society of Pain & Palliative Care Pharmacists Foundation.
- Cathy Farmer, Director of Clinical Services at Goodwin House [Hospice] in Alexandria, has been named a 2024 Vetern VIP Honoree for Women of Distinction by McKnight's.
- R. Scott Nash, PhD, Mercer University religion professor received this year's EXPy Award for excellence in experiential learning for his class on death and dying, featuring learning activities such as volunteering with a hospice ... with the purpose of making death less abstract for students. Dr. Nash also received the 2024 Faculty of the Year Award from the Student Government Association.

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Empath Health, Trustbridge leaders are setting home health sights high after integration

Home Health Care News; by Joyce Famakinwa; 7/26/24

Empath Health is a company in transition. In the spring, it completed an affiliation process with Trustbridge, which formed the largest nonprofit post-acute provider organization in the state of Florida. ... Since completion of the affiliation process, the company has focused on integration, synergistic opportunities and determining how best to deliver care to the communities it serves. One of the people at the helm of this transition is Tarrah Lowry, Empath Health's chief operating officer and Trustbridge's interim president. *[Click on the title's link to read the recent interview by Home Health Care News' with Tarrah Lowry.]*

Caregivers of end-of-life patients reveal the last words they hear most often and the most common regrets from patients

WhatsNew2Day; by Alexander; 7/27/24

... While each person's final moments are different, chaplains and palliative care nurses have said most people approach their death with "radical acceptance." People who are actively dying also often have a new sense of clarity about the universe and may even have a temporary burst of energy or sudden moments of clarity if they have dementia. The last words patients usually say to their families are to tell them they love them... [Often, people] who are in the midst of dying want to be surrounded by their loved ones and pets. Their final words are often words of love and pleas for forgiveness, as well as expressions of regret, ...

[Another described that people show] "a desire for connection" with loved ones and faith.

Editor's Note: This article provides a balanced scope of descriptions from several professionals, notably Catherine Duncan, Annemarie Switchulis, Neal Shah, and Zackary Price. In this day of social media, some hospice professionals (past or present) tout definitive, authoritative descriptions of what all dying persons experience, with too many assumptions and generalizations. Beware what you read and distribute, especially if the tone and language (of other articles) are sensationalized in a way to garner social media "expertise," followers and Shares--at the expense of more balanced, sensitive, diverse, personalized experiences.

Senators introduce bipartisan bill to expand access to senior care program [PACE]

FCFreePress.com; by News Desk - Health News; 7/25/24

[Thursday, 7/25/24,] U.S. Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Mike Braun (R-IN), leaders of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, introduced the bipartisan PACE Anytime Act. This legislative move seeks to broaden the accessibility of the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) which serves thousands of lower-income seniors and individuals with disabilities by offering comprehensive, integrated care. ... Under current regulations, eligible individuals can only enroll in PACE programs at the beginning of each month. The PACE Anytime Act proposes to remove this restriction, allowing for enrollment at any time during the month, thereby making the program more accessible.



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Sasha McAllum Pilkington on grace and storytelling at the end of life

Psychotherapy.net; by Lawrence Rubin; 7/22/24

Narrative Clinician, Sasha McAllum Pilkington [of New Zealand], shares poignant

stories she co-created with hospice clients which honor and celebrate their lives. [This interview includes: ...

- Meaning Making in the Shadow of Death ...
- "I think being alongside people who are dying, and their loved ones, is very important. When I speak of being 'alongside,' I am referring to supporting a person to reflect on their experience and what matters to them in ways where they experience themselves as worthy of respect and holding knowledge about their own life. I think recognizing our shared humanity is significant in working with people who are seriously ill and approaching death."
- Narrative Therapy: Discourses Around Death and Dying ...
- Building Meaning at the Threshold of Death ... A Therapist Reflects on Early and Ongoing Influences ...

For review of Sasha Pilington's other works, visit the [Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy \(JCNT\)](#).

Hospices strategize sustainable growth for Veteran Programs

Hospice News; by Holly Vossel; 7/26/24

Hospices combat both operational and financial challenges as they seek to grow and evolve their veteran programs around the diverse and complex needs of patients and their families. Some of the largest expenses associated with offering veteran services include staffing and training costs ... In addition to staff training, this includes having ways to honor veterans for their service, assess the social determinant of health resources they may need and identify gaps of caregiver support. ... Forming community collaborations with organizations such as We Honor Veterans [NHPCO], Wounded Warriors or the Veteran Affairs' (VA) Pet Partners therapy program can be beneficial to having a more inclusive care delivery approach.

Editor's Note: Notable mentions include Carlos Graveran, executive director at Maryland-based Frederick Health Hospice; Sherri Bickley, vice president of patient support services at Oklahoma-based Crossroads Hospice & Palliative Care; and Carla Creegan, PACE director of clinical services and director of adult day services at Empath Health.

Why home health providers should expect to see a ‘less draconian’ final payment rule

Home Health Care News; by Joyce Famakinwa; 7/22/24

As home health providers continue to digest the proposed payment rule for 2025, National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC) President William A. Dombi believes that the industry will ultimately see a comparatively toned down final rule. “We believe we will not end up with this proposed rule as a final rule,” he said during the opening presentation at NAHC’s Financial Management Conference in Las Vegas on Sunday. “We will end up with something less draconian. The cuts will be reduced because, No. 1, that’s what they’ve done for the last several years, and, No. 2, it’s an election year.” Even with a prediction of a “less draconian” final payment rule, NAHC is still gearing up to fight against home health cuts and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ (CMS) payment-setting methodologies.



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Acupuncture as a support in palliative care at Sun City Center HAW

The Tidewater News, Ruskin, FL; 7/22/24

Sun City Center Health and Wellness (HAW) is dedicated to providing comprehensive care for patients managing serious illnesses, championing the use of acupuncture as a key supportive treatment in palliative care. This practice, grounded in traditional Chinese medicine, offers relief from common symptoms and enhances overall well-being. ... The role of acupuncture in palliative care is gaining recognition for its potential to improve the quality of life for patients dealing with serious illnesses.

The bereavement care crisis in hospice facilities

MedCity News; by Cara McCarty Abbott; 7/28/24

Bereavement care is an essential part of the hospice experience, designed to support those coping with loss. Bereavement care is not just a compassionate gesture; it is a critical component of the hospice care continuum. So why is it so

underserved in the U.S.? ... Instead of pushing harder on hospice providers to find more ways to deliver comprehensive bereavement care with less, it's key to address the systemic forces hampering their ability to deliver quality care at the scale required and address these challenges.

Editor's Note: Additio nally, does your hospice still rely on the misnamed, overused "5 Stages of Grief"? These were determined from 1960's persons who were dying, not from bereaved persons who lived on--surviving--the deaths. Extensive fresh, contemporary, hospice-designed grief resources to support bereavement counselors and the persons they serve are provided by [Composing Life Out of Loss](#), a sponsor for our newsletter.

Hospices build community partnerships to better serve patients, employees

Hospice News; by Jim Parker; 7/29/24

Hospice care does not occur in a vacuum, and many operators find themselves building partnerships with other community organizations to better serve patients and support their staff. Providers work with other institutions to provide general inpatient and respite care, address social determinants of health and improve health equity, among other initiatives. Some also partner with medical and nursing schools to ensure students in health care fields gain exposure to hospice and palliative care principles.

No table Mentions: Skelly Wingard, CEO of By the Bay Health; Mary Shankster, Chief Development Officer at Stillwater Hospice; Altonia Garrett, COO of Blue Ridge Hospice



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Today's Encouragement

Never rob your character to enrich your pocket. ~James Lendall Basford, Seven Seventy Seven Sensations, 1897



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