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August 11th, 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 [published 8/6/24]: Additional responses

1. CMS Finalizes 2025 Hospice Payment Rule: A Modest Increase Amid Rising Challenges; *National Partnership for Healthcare and Hospice Innovation (NPHI)*; 7/31/24
2. CMS Posts FY 2025 Hospice Wage Index Final Rule; *Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP)*; 7/31/24
3. CMS Raises Medicare Pay For Hospices By 2.9% In Fiscal 2025; *KFF Health News*; 7/31/24
4. CMS gives hospices payment bump of 2.9 percent for FY 2025; *McKnight's Home Care*; 7/30/24
5. Hospice providers set for Medicare pay hike; *Modern Healthcare*; 7/30/24
6. Hospice 2.9% increase 'falls short'; *Healthcare Finance News*; 8/1/24

Pain Management at the End of Life

Journal of Hospice and Palliative Nursing; *HPNA position statement*; 8/24

Pain management is essential from the time of diagnosis of a serious illness and throughout the disease trajectory. Unfortunately, the prevalence of pain in those with serious illness remains unacceptably high. In most cases, pain experienced by people with advanced disease can be prevented or relieved through optimal care, yet studies reveal that patients continue to experience uncontrolled pain in the final weeks, days, and hours of their lives...

Familial loss of a loved one and biological aging: NIMHD Social Epigenomics Program

JAMA Network Open; by Allison E. Aiello, PhD, MS; Aura Ankita Mishra, PhD; Chantel L. Martin, PhD; Brandt Levitt, PhD; Lauren Gaydos, PhD; Daniel W. Belsky, PhD; Robert A. Hummer, PhD; Debra J. Umberson, PhD; Kathleen Mullan Harris, PhD; 7/29/24

Is the experience of losing a loved one associated with accelerated biological aging? In a cohort study of 3963 participants from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, nearly 40% experienced the loss of a close relation by adulthood. Participants who had experienced a greater number of losses exhibited significantly older biological ages compared with those who had not experienced such losses. These findings suggest that loss can accelerate biological aging even before midlife and that frequency of losses may compound this, potentially leading to earlier chronic diseases and mortality.

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Help improve the PEPPER Program

PEPPER email; 7/30/24

There is a temporary pause in distributing Program for Evaluating Payment Patterns Electronic Reports (PEPPERS) as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) work to improve and update the program and reporting system. This pause will remain in effect through the fall of 2024. We recognize the importance of these reports to your practice. Therefore, during this time, CMS will be working diligently to enhance the quality and accessibility of the reports. In fulfilling this commitment, CMS seeks responses to a series of questions listed

in the Request for Information (RFI). These questions will provide CMS with information that may be used to reevaluate PEPPER s and improve the effectiveness and accessibility of the program. The [RFI \(PDF\) is available here](#). Responses are due on or before 08/19/2024 and must be provided via online submission at the following address: CBRPEPPERInquiries@cms.hhs.gov.

Executive Personnel Changes - 8/2/24

- [Big Bend Hospice announced](#)
 - [Amanda Gustafson as Executive Director of Big Bend Hospice](#)
 - [Nicole Holm as Chief Compliance Officer of Seven Oaks Health](#)
- [Hospice of Acadiana, LA, named Stacy Mistic as Interim CEO, replacing Keith Everett](#)
- [Hospice of Ukia in Ukia, CA has named Carole Brodsky as its Executive Director](#)
- [Interim HealthCare promoted](#)
 - [Crystal Adams to Vice President of Human Resources](#)
 - [Kiersten Colovin to Vice President of Experience, Insights, and Innovation](#)
- [Rainbow Community Care, WI, named Carol Brown as President & CEO in April 2024, replacing Karen Carrig](#)

Home health sees spending, utilization decline as hospice equivalents grow, MedPAC reports

McKnight's Home Care; by Adam Healy; 7/19/24

Though hospice spending and utilization appear to be on the rise, Medicare spending on home health has fallen amid declining utilization in recent years, according to a new [report](#) by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. In 2022, the year of the most recent available data, Medicare home health spending shrank to \$16.4 billion. That compares to \$17 billion the year prior, the report found. Meanwhile, the number of home health users declined by 6.3% from 2021, and the overall share of Medicare beneficiaries that use home health shrank by 3% from the year prior. The total number of in-person home health visits decreased by 9.6% year-over-year in 2022... Meanwhile, the hospice industry has experienced both reimbursement and utilization gains in recent years, MedPAC reported. Medicare hospice payments rose 2.7% year-over-year in 2022, while the number of beneficiaries using hospice services ticked up by

0.4%. These patients are also receiving more care; the total number of hospice days provided to beneficiaries increased by 2% in 2022.



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Empath Health, American Health Plans launch ISNP joint venture

Hospice News; by Jim Parker; 8/6/24

The nonprofit senior care provider Empath Health is partnering with the Medicare Advantage organization American Health Plans (AHP), a division of American Health Partners to serve patients who are enrolled in Institutional Special Needs Plans (ISNP). ISNPs are Medicare Advantage plans that are designed to serve beneficiaries who live in skilled nursing facilities. Through the Empath partnership, members of AHP's American Health Advantage of Florida ISNP will receive interdisciplinary services from TruHealth of Florida, the clinical arm of the ISNP. TruHealth is a newly established joint venture between AHP and Empath. Patients will also have access to Empath Health's "full-life care" model.

Notable mentions: Jonathan Fleece, Empath Health CEO.

Avow Kids receives transformational gift from Naples Children & Education Foundation

Avow Hospice press release; 7/23/24

Avow Foundation has received a generous grant of \$115,000 from the Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), the founding organization of the Naples Winter Wine Festival. The grant is specifically intended for Avow Kids, a program for children ages 5 - 17 that provides support and companionship to youth experiencing any type of grief. The grant will support Avow Kids' various services, such as individual counseling, support groups, workshops, camps, music therapy, movie nights, and more.

National plan on aging 'essential' to addressing key issues: AARP

McKnight's Senior Living; by Kimberly Bonvissuto; 7/18/24

Aging, itself, isn't a challenge - but being unprepared for aging is, according to AARP, which on Wednesday released a white paper that lays out a [blueprint](#) for developing a national plan on aging. The paper marks the launch of the organization's Aging Well in America Initiative, for which the AARP took best practices from federal, state and local initiatives to create a blueprint for the development of a "robust" national plan to foster the well-being, quality of life and dignity of older Americans.



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How the Hospice CARE Act could change respite services

Hospice News; by Jim Parker; 8/1/24

The Hospice Care Accountability, Reform, and Enforcement (Hospice CARE) Act, if enacted, would make changes to the ways hospices provide respite care. Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon) is in the process of drafting the bill that would represent the most significant reforms to date for hospice payment and oversight. The legislation is currently in a discussion draft phase, which has been circulated among the nation's major industry trade associations and their members for feedback. ... "There's evidence that people who take advantage of hospice care delivered properly, actually have a higher quality of life. Oftentimes, they live longer," Blumenauer said at Elevate. "This is an opportunity to do something in this Congress that is concrete, specific, that will save money and improve the quality of care for some of our most vulnerable people."

Florida Blue boosts local bereavement support with donation

Avow Hospice press release; 7/18/24

In May 2024, Florida Blue Foundation announced a \$20,000 grant in support of Avow's bereavement programs, which are available at no cost to individuals of all ages. With this grant, Avow is able to pursue its mission of providing compassionate care through life's hardest transitions. Florida Blue awarded this

grant on the basis of promoting mental well-being for all individuals, one of the foundation's strategic pillars, as grief counseling is essential for maintaining and advancing the mental well-being of individuals and families.

Becoming time rich with physician moms: Sarah Wittry and Nicole Perrotte

MarketScale - Ripple of Change; by Todd Otten; 7/30/24

In today's high-stress healthcare environment, physician mothers face the formidable challenge of balancing demanding careers with their personal lives. The conversation on work-life balance is more relevant than ever, with more women in medicine seeking ways to manage these dual responsibilities effectively. How can physician moms navigate this landscape to reclaim time for themselves without guilt? What strategies can physician moms employ to achieve a healthier work-life balance? This pressing question lies at the heart of today's discussion on the Ripple of Change podcast. ... Key points of discussion:

- Boundary Setting ...
- Microhabit Management ...
- Support Networks ...



Today's Encouragement

The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the same steel that secures your life against being destroyed secures your life also against being opened up and transformed. ~Frederick Buechner, The Sacred Journey



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