

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, October 16, 2017

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate meets at 4pm; plans vote on nomination of Callista Gingrich to be ambassador to the Vatican at 5:30pm
- Senate this week may take up a House-passed \$36.5b aid package, H.R. 2266, to help areas affected by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria as well as western states hit by wildfires
- Senate could also take up FY18 budget resolution that would set up procedure allowing GOP to dodge Democratic filibusters on future tax overhaul

House

- House out until week of Oct. 23; holds pro forma session today

Legislative Update

• **Week in Review**

- ***Trump to Scrap Critical Health Care Subsidies, Hitting Obamacare Again.***
“President Trump will scrap subsidies to health insurance companies that help pay out-of-pocket costs of low-income people, the White House said late Thursday. His plans were disclosed hours after the president ordered potentially sweeping changes in the nation’s insurance system, including sales of cheaper policies with fewer benefits and fewer protections for consumers. The twin hits to the Affordable Care Act could unravel President Barack Obama’s signature domestic achievement, sending insurance premiums soaring and insurance companies fleeing from the health law’s online marketplaces. After Republicans failed to repeal the health law in Congress, Mr. Trump appears determined to dismantle it on his own.”
 - To read more:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/12/us/politics/trump-obamacare-executive-order-health-insurance.html>
- ***House bill would require health plans to accept 3rd party payment assistance.***
“On Oct. 5, Representative Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., introduced legislation that

would amend the Affordable Care Act to allow third-party payments and charitable assistance. H.R. 3976, called the Access to Marketplace Insurance Act, would open the door to charitable contributions like the American Kidney Fund's Health Insurance Premium Program (HIPPP), which is funded largely by dialysis companies to help patients pay their health coverage premiums. The bill specifically allows non-profits, civic groups, and churches to help pay cost sharing and health insurance premiums for individuals and families. Many health insurers have been refusing payments from third parties, including the American Kidney Fund."

- To read more: <https://www.nephrologynews.com/house-bill-would-require-health-plans-to-accept-3rd-party-payment-assistance/>

- **Trump opposes bipartisan Obamacare rescue plan.** "President Donald Trump will oppose any congressional attempts to reinstate funding for Obamacare subsidies – unless he gets something in return, his budget director Mick Mulvaney said in an interview Friday morning. The comments by the Office of Management and Budget chief delivered a severe blow to efforts by Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) to strike a bipartisan deal on funding the subsidies. Trump canceled those payments to insurance companies on Thursday night, raising hopes among some Democrats and centrist Republicans that the Trump administration could accept a bill that would revive the subsidies while offering states more flexibility to opt out of Obamacare."

- To read more: <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/13/trump-opposes-bipartisan-obamacare-rescue-plan-243752>

- **18 states sue over Trump-halted ObamaCare payments.** "A new multi-state lawsuit has been announced to stop President Trump from halting key ObamaCare payments to insurers. Eighteen states and Washington, D.C., signed onto the lawsuit filed Friday in federal court in California, according to Sarah Lovenheim, a spokeswoman for California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D). On Thursday night, Trump announced he would stop making the payments, which led to an outcry from critics saying he was sabotaging the health-care law."

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/355360-15-states-sue-over-trump-halted-obamacare-payments>

- **Week Ahead**

- **Lawmakers face fallout from Trump's ObamaCare moves.** "All eyes are on Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.), the leaders of the Senate Health Committee who have been working to craft a bipartisan deal to stabilize the insurance markets. Their efforts grew more urgent late Thursday night when President Trump announced he was halting key payments to insurers. Before the Senate's week-long recess, Alexander said he had agreed to fund the payments for two years, but there hasn't been a bipartisan agreement on an overall package."

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/355405-week-ahead-lawmakers-face-fallout-from-trumps-obamacare-moves>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- ***Trump names Eric Hargan as acting Health Secretary.*** “President Donald Trump has appointed Eric Hargan as acting Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), the White House said on Tuesday. Hargan, the deputy secretary of HHS, formerly served on Trump’s transition team for HHS. The appointment follows Tom Price’s resignation as HHS Secretary late in September over his use of costly private charter planes for government business.”
 - For more information: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-hargan/trump-names-eric-hargan-as-acting-health-secretary-idUSKBN1CG0A6>
- ***CMS Takes Steps to help with Hurricane Nate Emergency Response.*** “Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma today announced agency efforts underway to support Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi in response to Hurricane Nate. On Oct. 8, 2017, Acting Health and Human Services Secretary Don Wright, M.D., M.P.H., declared a public health emergency in these four states. With the public health emergency in effect, CMS has taken several actions to provide immediate relief to those affected by the hurricane. The actions include temporarily waiving or modifying certain Medicare, Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) requirements.”
 - To read more: <https://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Press-releases/2017-Press-releases-items/2017-10-10.html>
- ***MedPAC recommends Congress eliminate MIPS payment track in MACRA.*** “The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, which advises Congress on Medicare policy, has come out strongly against the merit-based incentive system for physician payment and bonuses. MedPAC wants Congress to get rid of MIPS and its reporting requirements now before the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services starts making payment adjustments under the program in 2019.”
 - To read more: <http://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/medpac-recommends-congress-eliminate-mips-payment-track-macra>
- ***Medicare Advantage star ratings show little change.*** “Payers have been embracing the MA market recently, and with more baby boomers hitting retirement age, they see a growth opportunity. Many insurers have found more investment in MA is paying off. Humana has pulled out the ACA exchanges entirely to focus on MA plans, and UnitedHealth Group said recently it expects that eventually half of all Medicare beneficiaries will be in MA. Insurers strive for high ratings to entice more enrollees and for the potential financial rewards. Top-rated plans (those with four or five stars) get a 5% quality bonus. For 2018, the number of plans receiving that bonus is 44%, down from 49% in 2017.”
 - To read more: <http://www.healthcarediver.com/news/medicare-advantage-star-ratings-show-little-change/507063/>

Articles of Interest

- ***Childhood Obesity Rises 10-Fold Worldwide Over 4 Decades.*** “Childhood obesity has increased more than 10-fold worldwide since 1975, a new study reports. But even more children are underweight than severely overweight, according to the analysis of data from 200 countries. Researchers found that by 2016 overall obesity rates had jumped from less than 1 percent to almost 6 percent for girls and nearly 8 percent for boys -- with rates at 20 percent or higher in the United States, Egypt and some Polynesian islands.”
 - To read more: <https://consumer.healthday.com/vitamins-and-nutrition-information-27/obesity-health-news-505/childhood-obesity-rises-10-fold-worldwide-over-4-decades-727386.html>
- ***#RenalDietChallenge: How Much Phosphorus Is In This Meal?*** “In May 2017, a group of eight nephrology healthcare workers participated in the renal diet challenge where, for three days, they followed the diet that is recommended to patients diagnosed with end stage renal disease (ESRD). Timothy Yau (AJKDBlog), AJKD’s Social Media Editor, interviews two of the participants about their experience. Beth Durkee (BD) is a nephrology social worker and Terry Mehigan (TM) is a nephrology nurse practitioner.”
 - To read more: <https://ajkdblog.org/2017/10/09/renaldietchallenge-how-much-phosphorus-is-in-this-meal/>