

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, February 26, 2018

Congressional Schedule

House

- House meets, first votes at 6:30 pm

Senate

- Senate meets at 3 pm; first votes 5:30 pm
- Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Feb. 15 teed up several nominations for action after chamber failed to advance any plan on immigration and DACA

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**
 - *U.S. to extend skimpy health insurance outside of Obamacare.* “The U.S. government on Tuesday proposed extending the availability of skimpy health insurance plans to millions of Americans in another Trump administration move aimed at undercutting the requirements of the Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare.”
 - To read more: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-insurance/u-s-to-extend-skimpy-health-insurance-outside-of-obamacare-idUSKCN1G41SH>
 - *Democrats march toward single-payer health care.* “Single-payer health care is gaining ground among Democrats. In a sign of the party’s move to the left on the issue, the Center for American Progress (CAP), a bastion of the Democratic establishment, this week released a plan that comes very close to a single-payer system.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/375376-democrats-march-toward-single-payer-health-care>

- ***GOP, Dem governors push national health care compromise.*** “A bipartisan group of governors working to strike compromise on hot-button policy issues will take on the health care question at an event Friday. Republican Gov. John Kasich, of Ohio, Democratic Gov. John Hickenlooper, of Colorado, and Alaska Gov. Bill Walker, an independent, are among governors scheduled to headline a briefing at the National Press Club in Washington to discuss their latest ideas for improving the nation's health care system.”
 - To read more: <https://www.chillicothegazette.com/story/news/state/2018/02/23/gop-dem-governors-push-national-health-care-compromise/366271002/>

- ***HHS chief pitches new measures to expand opioid addiction treatment.*** “Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar is touting medication-assisted treatment (MAT) as a crucial component of stemming the opioid crisis plaguing the nation.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/375455-hhs-chief-pitches-new-measures-to-expand-opioid-addiction-treatment>

- ***House panel announces opioid enforcement bills ahead of hearing.*** “A House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on Thursday unveiled eight bills it will examine during a hearing next week on enforcement-related measures to help combat the opioid crisis.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/375113-house-panel-announces-opioid-enforcement-bills-ahead-of-hearing>

- ***Dems seek reversal of nursing home regulatory rollback.*** “A group of Democratic senators want the Trump administration to reverse its steady rollback of regulations on nursing homes. In a letter sent to Alex Azar, the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as Seema Verma, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Democrats allege that the regulatory rollback ‘will inevitably weaken the safety of our nation’s nursing homes and put patients, many of whom are elderly and wholly reliant on this care, at greater risk.’”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/374727-dems-seek-reversal-of-nursing-home-regulatory-rollback>

- ***VA privatization ‘is a very real issue right now,’ American Legion says.*** “Recent reports of internal squabbles between top leaders at the Veterans Affairs Department and White House appointees have the nation’s largest veterans service organization actively reinforcing its message about the Veterans Choice Program. The American Legion is adamantly speaking out

against proposals that may move the VA's health system in the direction of privatized care."

- To read more: <https://federalnewsradio.com/veterans-affairs/2018/02/va-privatization-is-a-very-real-issue-right-now-american-legion-says/>

- **Week Ahead**

- **Senate pivots to stopgap 'Dreamers' deal.** "The Senate is weighing a short-term fix for 'Dreamers' as lawmakers struggle to break a stalemate that has stalled the chamber's debate. The hunt for a fallback option comes ahead of the March 5 deadline created by President Trump's decision to end the immigration program and amid fresh questions about what, if anything, can clear Congress and win over the White House."
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/375377-senate-pivots-to-stopgap-dreamers-deal>
- **House panel begins work on opioid bills.** "The House Energy and Commerce Committee is launching legislative work on bills aimed at curbing the nation's opioid epidemic, which resulted in more deaths last year than car accidents."
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/375362-week-ahead-house-panel-begins-work-on-opioid-bills>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- **FDA announces recall of dietary supplements after opioid declaration.** "The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Wednesday announced a recall of dietary supplements that contain kratom, a herb the agency has classified as an opioid. FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb also urged manufacturers to stop selling products intended for human consumption if they contain kratom."
 - For more information: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/374924-fda-announces-recall-of-dietary-supplements-after-declaring-it-an-opioid>
- **Health chief exploring more actions on high drug prices.** "Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar says his department is working on additional proposals aimed at high drug prices, including some that could be enacted without congressional action. In an interview with WTHR in Indianapolis on Tuesday, Azar pointed to the proposals to Congress on drug pricing that the administration made in its budget this month, but also said the department is working on other proposals that might not need congressional approval."

- To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/374890-health-chief-exploring-more-actions-on-high-drug-prices>
- ***Medicare Patients Nationwide Will Get a Chance to Try Value-Based Insurance Idea.*** “A health insurance concept born from University of Michigan research may soon reach millions of people covered by Medicare across the United States, and allow them to keep more dollars in their wallets while getting treated for chronic diseases such as diabetes, depression and heart failure. The new national budget signed by President Trump instructs the agency that runs Medicare to allow Medicare Advantage plans in all 50 states to test ‘value based insurance design’ for people with chronic health conditions.”
 - To read more: <http://www.newswise.com/articles/medicare-patients-nationwide-will-get-a-chance-to-try-value-based-insurance-idea>
- ***How Value-Based Medicare Payments Exacerbate Health Care Disparities.*** “For more than a decade, Medicare had paid physicians based on the number of services they provided to fee-for-service beneficiaries, whether or not those services were needed. Under MACRA, however, Medicare would assess the quality, value, and results of care physicians provided to these beneficiaries and reward the top performers while penalizing the worst. The problem, health policy researchers say, is that evidence about how best to evaluate health care quality is lacking and currently used measures fail to account for differences in patients’ socioeconomic and health status that could skew quality scores in favor of practices that care for higher-income, better-educated, and less-complex patients.”
 - To read more: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2673607>

Articles of Interest

- ***Reducing Red Tape For Traveling Nurses.*** “The license, known as the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), was launched in 2000 to address nursing shortages and enable more nurses to practice telehealth. Under the agreement, registered nurses licensed in a participating state can practice in other NLC states without needing a separate license. They must still abide by the laws that govern nursing wherever their patients are located.”
 - To read more: <https://khn.org/news/reducing-red-tape-for-traveling-nurses/>
- ***How to Challenge a Nursing Home Eviction Notice, and Other Tips.*** “Many nursing home residents are unaware of their rights. So when these individuals face the threat of eviction, legal advocates say, many of them do not even realize they have the right to challenge their discharge. Below is a list of several of those rights under federal law along with tips from lawyers and advocates who work on behalf of nursing home residents.”

- To read more: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/22/business/nursing-home-eviction-rights.html>
- **Study: ObamaCare premiums to rise 18 percent from GOP-backed changes.** “ObamaCare premiums will rise an average of 18.2 percent next year due to GOP-backed changes to the health law, according to a study from the left-leaning Urban Institute released Monday.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/375570-study-obamacare-premiums-to-rise-18-percent-from-gop-backed-changes>
- **Complaints About Nursing Home Evictions Rise, and Regulators Take Note.** “Discharges and evictions have been the top-ranking category of grievances brought to state long-term care ombudsman programs, the ombudsman agencies say. While nursing homes can discharge residents for a limited [set of reasons](#), legal advocates say that home operators sometimes interpret those reasons in unjustified ways. Often, it’s because the residents’ more lucrative Medicare coverage is ending, which is what Ms. Zwaschka-Blansfield said happened in her case.”
 - To read more: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/22/business/nursing-home-eviction-regulators.html?mtrref=undefined>
- **What the Hospitals of the Future Look Like.** “The days of the hospital as we know it may be numbered. In a shift away from their traditional inpatient facilities, health-care providers are investing in outpatient clinics, same-day surgery centers, free-standing emergency rooms and microhospitals, which offer as few as eight beds for overnight stays. They are setting up programs that monitor people 24/7 in their own homes. And they are turning to digital technology to treat and keep tabs on patients remotely from a high-tech hub.”
 - To read more: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-the-hospitals-of-the-future-look-like-1519614660>
- **Scott Walker wants to save Obamacare in Wisconsin.** “Wisconsin’s Scott Walker, one of the nation’s most militantly anti-Obamacare governors, is making strengthening the health care law a key plank of his reelection platform as Republicans fret over potential losses in November. Walker wants to prop up his Obamacare market with a \$200 million program that would compensate health insurers for high-cost patients so they don’t hike premiums for everyone. He also would enshrine some Obamacare protections for people with pre-existing conditions.”
 - To read more: <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/23/scott-walker-obamacare-wisconsin-358043>

- ***Even for Bezos, Fixing Health Care Will Be Hard.*** “Every year, health care consumes a larger share of the U.S. economy. Decades of grand efforts to control costs mostly haven’t worked: Health care now accounts for about 18 percent of gross domestic product. Warren Buffett has compared the system to a hungry tapeworm eating away at its corporate and taxpayer hosts. Now he’s trying to do something about it by forming a health-care alliance with Jeff Bezos’s Amazon.com Inc. and Jamie Dimon’s JPMorgan Chase & Co. Can the Buffett-Bezos-Dimon effort succeed where others failed?”
 - To read more: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-23/even-for-bezos-fixing-health-care-will-be-hard-quicktake>
- ***Bad Bedside Manna: Bank Loans Signed In The Hospital Leave Patients Vulnerable.*** “Hospitals are increasingly offering “patient-financing” strategies, cooperating with financial institutions to offer on-the-spot loans to make sure patients pay their bills. Private doctors’ offices and surgery centers have long offered such no- or low-interest financing for procedures not covered by insurance, like plastic surgery, or to patients paying themselves for an expensive test or procedure with a fixed price.”
 - To read more: <https://khn.org/news/bad-bedside-manna-bank-loans-signed-in-the-hospital-leave-patients-vulnerable/>