

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, April 9, 2018

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate returns from recess, meets at 3 pm; holds cloture vote on nomination of Claria Boom to be U.S. district court judge at 5:30 pm

House

- House meets in pro forma session at 11 am; chamber reconvenes Tuesday

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**
 - *Sen. Collins says she's not giving up on fixes for Affordable Care Act.* "U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said Wednesday that she hasn't given up on fixes to the Affordable Care Act's individual marketplace, despite such efforts failing in Congress last month. But she's "not very optimistic" that the measures will be taken up this year."
 - Read more: <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/04/04/sen-susan-collins-says-shes-not-giving-up-on-future-affordable-care-act-fixes/>
 - *Senators launch probe into why price of cancer drug increased 1400 percent.* "Three U.S. senators are asking why a 40-year-old cancer drug has increased in price by 1,400 percent since 2013. The drug in question, lomustine, was introduced in 1976 to treat brain tumors and Hodgkin lymphoma. Lomustine, which has no generic competition, cost \$50 for a capsule with the highest dose in 2013. Now a capsule with the same dose costs \$768."
 - Read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/381287-senators-launch-probe-into-why-price-of-cancer-drug-increased-1400-percent>
 - *NIH director: Sports leagues should rethink sponsoring unhealthy foods.* "The director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is calling on major sports

leagues to re-examine their sponsorship deals with unhealthy foods, out of fear they are fueling the country's obesity problem. Dr. Francis Collins in a blog post pointed to NIH-funded research showing that more than 75 percent of foods promoted by major sports leagues are unhealthy."

- Read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/381444-nih-director-sports-leagues-should-rethink-sponsoring-unhealthy-foods>

- **Week Ahead**

- ***Senate panel unveils draft bill to combat opioid addiction.*** "The Senate health panel on Wednesday released a discussion draft intended to curb opioid addiction. The development comes as other House and Senate committees also prepare legislation. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee plans to discuss this legislation at an upcoming hearing on April 11. The panel has already held six hearings on the opioid crisis so far this Congress featuring representatives from agencies including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as governors from states affected by the crisis."
 - Read more: <http://www.rollcall.com/news/policy/senate-panel-unveils-draft-bill-combat-opioid-addiction>
- ***House lawmakers hope to bring opioid legislation to vote before Memorial Day.*** "A key House committee will hold the last of three major hearings to address the opioid crisis on April 11, and hopes to bring a legislative package to the floor before the House breaks for Memorial Day on May 24, according to GOP aides on Capitol Hill. The third hearing of the House Energy and Commerce health subcommittee will focus on insurance coverage, payment issues, and prescription regulations for Medicaid beneficiaries. An initial session focused on enforcement issues and a second discussed public health, treatment, and prevention strategies."
 - Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2018/03/29/house-opioid-legislation-vote/>
- ***Lobbyists say bill easing privacy protections for addiction records may be moving ahead.*** "As the House Energy and Commerce Committee is considering more than two dozen bills as part of a bipartisan push to bring a legislative package on opioid addiction to the House floor by Memorial Day, two lobbyists said a controversial measure that would loosen privacy protections for substance abuse records could be included. The bill, H.R. 3545, would relax 42 CFR Part 2, a statute that dates back to 1970, which requires a patient to give special, written consent to share substance use disorder records with physicians and hospitals."
 - Read more: <https://morningconsult.com/2018/03/29/lobbyists-say-bill-easing-privacy-protections-addiction-records-may-be-moving-ahead/>

- ***GOP looks to reduce spending after hearing criticism back home.*** “Republicans are eyeing ways to rein in spending this week after facing a barrage of criticism back home for swelling the federal deficit with a massive government funding package. Republican lawmakers who ran on a platform of fiscal responsibility say they are feeling the heat from constituents outraged over government spending.”
 - Read more: <http://thehill.com/homenews/house/382300-gop-looks-to-reduce-spending-after-hearing-criticism-back-home>

Regulatory and Administration Update

- ***In rare advisory, surgeon general urges public to carry overdose-reversal medication.*** “Surgeon General Jerome Adams is issuing a rare public health advisory on Thursday, calling for friends and family of people at risk for opioid overdoses to carry the OD-reversal medication naloxone. He likened the treatment to other lifesaving interventions, such as knowing how to perform CPR or use an EpiPen.”
 - Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2018/04/05/surgeon-general-advisory-naloxone/>
- ***Facebook and Twitter pushed to do more to halt online opioid sales.*** “The top U.S. drug regulator wants social-media sites including Facebook Inc. and Twitter Inc. to do more to stop illegal online sales of opioids that are contributing to hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb is expected to say in a speech on Wednesday that social-media companies and internet-service providers need to be more proactive in rooting out sales pitches for addictive painkillers. He said that while the platforms are reluctant to police content the ads are ‘insidious threats.’”
 - Read more: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-04/facebook-twitter-pushed-to-do-more-to-halt-online-opioid-sales>
- ***CMS tweaks opioid proposal after backlash.*** “The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has released a sweeping final Medicare rule that included altering a draft proposal aimed at curbing the opioid epidemic that had proven controversial. The agency had received pushback on a proposal that would have meant a prescription for high doses of opioids (90 milligrams of morphine per day or more) automatically wouldn’t be filled and the patient would need special permission from their private insurance company in order to receive the medication.”
 - Read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/381493-cms-tweaks-opioid-proposal-after-sparking-backlash>
- ***Medicare puts off decision on lowering drug prices patients pay at the pharmacy.*** “The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services laid out a bevy of initiatives Monday that officials said would reduce drug prices for patients covered by the Medicare Part D

prescription drug program – but they have made no decisions yet on an issue that has confounded lawmakers and patients alike. That issue is whether the discounts that pharmacy benefit managers negotiate for drugs – the ‘rebates’ that lawmakers have been raising questions about in recent months – as well as other fees, should go toward lowering the price that a patient pays at the pharmacy.”

- Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2018/04/02/medicare-puts-off-drug-pricing-decision/>
- ***U.S. government sets 3.40 percent hike in 2019 payments to Medicare insurers.*** “The U.S. government on Monday said it would increase by 3.40 percent on average 2019 payments to the health insurers that manage Medicare Advantage insurance plans for seniors and the disabled, a higher-than-expected rise reflecting a projection of higher medical cost growth.”
 - Read more: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-healthcare-medicare/u-s-government-sets-3-40-percent-hike-in-2019-payments-to-medicare-insurers-idUSKCN1H91W3>
- ***Medicare Advantage plans cleared to go beyond medical coverage – even groceries.*** “Air conditioners for people with asthma, healthy groceries, rides to medical appointments and home-delivered meals may be among the new benefits added to Medicare Advantage coverage when new federal rules take effect next year. On Monday, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded how it defines the ‘primarily health-related’ benefits that insurers are allowed to include in their Medicare Advantage policies. And insurers would include these extras on top of providing the benefits traditional Medicare offers.”
 - Read more: <https://khn.org/news/medicare-advantage-plans-cleared-to-go-beyond-medical-coverage-even-groceries/>
- ***Medicare program linked with reduced black-white disparities in hospital readmissions.*** “Black-white disparities in hospital readmission rates in the U.S. narrowed after the introduction of a Medicare program that penalizes higher-than-expected readmissions. Minority-serving hospitals continue to disproportionately receive penalties for their readmission rates, suggesting that more work needs to be done to ensure that pay-for-performance programs promote greater equity in care.”
 - Read more: https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2018-04/htcs-mp1033018.php

Articles of Interest

- ***CVS to offer discount to the uninsured for anti-overdose drug.*** “CVS Health will offer a discount on the anti-overdose drug Narcan to uninsured customers, the company announced Thursday. CVS will apply a manufacturer’s coupon for Narcan nasal spray

for patients without insurance. It will reduce the cost to \$94.99, which the company said is the lowest price available for people without insurance.”

- Read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/medical-devices-and-prescription-drug-policy/381810-cvs-health-to-offer-discount>
- ***CVS Health eyes kidney patients for next expansion into care.*** “CVS Health will begin its expansion into kidney care with a program that helps identify chronic kidney disease early. The company will also offer home dialysis for patients through its Coram business, and it is working with another unspecified company to develop a new device for that. Company leaders have said they aren't planning to replace doctors. Instead, they want to use their national reach to supplement the care patients already receive from a physician.”
 - Read more: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/cvs-health-eyes-kidney-patients-for-next-expansion-into-care.html>
- ***CDC finds ‘nightmare bacteria’ spreading across the country.*** “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2017 found more than 200 cases of ‘nightmare bacteria’ that can resist most antibiotics, according to a new report released Tuesday. The CDC has long warned about antibiotic-resistant bacteria, but the report shows that unusual resistance germs, which are resistant to all or most antibiotics tested and are uncommon or carry special resistance genes, are constantly developing and spreading.”
 - Read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/public-global-health/381458-cdc-finds-nightmare-bacteria-spreading-across-the>
- ***Union targets third state for limiting dialysis company profits.*** “The Los Angeles-based Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West is now targeting Arizona voters to approve a ballot measure this November that would limit profits for dialysis companies. The Kidney Dialysis Patient Protection Act, versions of which have already been introduced in Ohio and California, would limit dialysis corporations’ revenues to 15% above the amount they spend on patient care and require annual inspections of dialysis clinics. Organizers said in a press release that they need to collect the signatures of 150,642 registered Arizona voters and submit them to election officials by July 5 to get on the November ballot.”
 - Read more: <https://www.healio.com/nephrology/kidney-care-community/news/online/%7Bf9b1dba0-6a21-4c9a-99e7-09fa4fcf7833%7D/union-targets-third-state-for-limiting-dialysis-company-profits>
- ***Trump tariffs target key ingredients for dozens of drugs.*** “The Trump administration’s proposed tariffs on thousands of Chinese-manufactured products would target dozens of key products used by drugmakers, as well as medical devices including pacemakers and artificial joints. The 25 percent tariff would be placed on raw ingredients for drugs such as insulin used by diabetics, the anti-allergic-reaction drug epinephrine, as well as vaccines, blood products and antidepressants, according to the list. The tariffs would

also target medical devices and diagnostic equipment including syringes, MRI machines, defibrillators, artificial joints, and pacemakers.”

- Read more: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-03/trump-tariffs-target-ingredients-for-dozens-of-pharmaceuticals>
- ***Custom meals could help curb hospital stays for people with chronic disease.*** “Good food isn’t just good for the body – it might also curb hospital stays and health care costs for some patients with chronic conditions, according to new research. The study, published Monday in *Health Affairs*, followed patients who received medically tailored meals from Community Servings. Researchers found that people who received medically tailored meals were less likely to use pricey health care services, such as ambulances and emergency rooms. And participants in the program were also less likely to be admitted to the hospital.”
 - Read more: <https://www.statnews.com/2018/04/02/food-chronic-disease-hospital-stays/>
- ***Walmart is looking at buying PillPack, an online pharmacy, for under \$1 billion.*** “Sources say Walmart is looking at scooping up PillPack, a start-up that helps manage prescriptions by packaging pills together and delivering them, for less than \$1 billion. Amazon also courted the online pharmacy start-up, the sources said. PillPack is a strategically important start-up, given its focus on customer service for people who are juggling multiple medications.”
 - Read more: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/02/walmart-buying-pillpack-online-pharmacy-sources.html>
- ***Large skilled nursing chain Signature plans eventual home health expansion.*** “When Signature HealthCARE added a home health arm through a 2014 acquisition, the major skilled nursing facility (SNF) company intended to eventually operate home health in all its SNF markets. Four years later, Signature’s home health footprint has not yet grown, but the Louisville-based company still believes in expanding home health once headwinds abate for its skilled nursing operations.”
 - Read more: <https://homehealthcarenews.com/2018/04/large-skilled-nursing-chain-signature-plans-eventual-home-health-expansion/>
- ***Patient advocacy groups take in millions from drugmakers. Is there a payback?*** “Pharmaceutical companies gave at least \$116 million to patient advocacy groups in a single year, reveals a new database logging 12,000 donations from large publicly traded drugmakers to such organizations. Even as these patient groups grow in number and political influence, their funding and their relationships to drugmakers are little understood. Unlike payments to doctors and lobbying expenses, companies do not have to report payments to the groups.”
 - Read more: <https://khn.org/news/patient-advocacy-groups-take-in-millions-from-drugmakers-is-there-a-payback/>

- *Older Americans are hooked on vitamins despite scarce evidence they work.* “More than half of Americans take vitamin supplements, including 68 percent of those age 65 and older, according to a 2013 Gallup poll. Among older adults, 29 percent take four or more supplements of any kind, according to a Journal of Nutrition study published in 2017. Often, preliminary studies fuel irrational exuberance about a promising dietary supplement, leading millions of people to buy in to the trend. Many never stop. They continue even though more rigorous studies – which can take many years to complete – almost never find that vitamins prevent disease, and in some cases cause harm.”
 - Read more: <https://khn.org/news/older-americans-are-hooked-on-vitamins-despite-scarce-evidence-they-work/>