

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update - Monday, June 12, 2017

Congressional Schedule

House

- “Convenes at 2 p.m. for consideration of 10 bills under suspension of the rules.” (CQ)
- **Week Ahead:** Tuesday the House takes up a bill (HR 2581) on verifying recipients of tax credits or subsidies included in the 2010 health care law and a bill (S 1094) on whistleblowers at the VA. Wednesday the House votes on a bill (HR 2372) on IRS regulations for veterans tax credits in Obamacare. Later in the week the House is expected to vote on two more measures (HR 1215, HR 2579) on taxes within Obamacare.” (CQ)

Senate

- “Convenes at 4 p.m. to continue consideration of a bill (S 722) on sanctions on those aiding Iran's ballistic missile development. At 5:30 p.m., the Senate is expected to vote on the nomination of Kenneth P. Rapuano to be an assistant secretary of Defense. The Senate is then expected to hold a voice vote on the motion to proceed on the sanctions bill.” (CQ)

Legislative Updates

- **Week in Review:**
 - *Trump will keep NIH director.* “President Donald Trump has decided to keep Francis Collins as director of the NIH, the White House announced Tuesday. There has long been speculation about whether Trump would keep Collins on to oversee the \$34 billion per year medical research agency. Rep. Andy Harris, a Republican doctor from Maryland, had also been in the running to be NIH chief. Collins is leading major HHS-wide initiatives into fighting cancer and neurological disorders. The Precision Medicine Initiative, an effort begun last year to study the interaction of genes and environment in more than 1 million Americans, is Collins’ brainchild.”
 - To read more: <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/06/06/trump-will-keep-nih-director-239206/>

- ***HHS Secretary Defends Budget Proposal in House, Senate.*** “Anyone who watched Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tom Price, MD testify before committees in both the House and Senate Thursday could be forgiven for getting a sense of déjà vu by the afternoon. Price, who was on the Hill to testify about the HHS budget, kept repeating the same thing about the administration's goals for the budget: "If the amount of government spending were truly a measure of success, Medicaid would be hailed as one of the most successful programs in history, " he said at both the hearing before the Senate Finance Committee and the hearing before the House Ways and Means Committee hearing.”
 - To read more: <https://www.medpagetoday.com/publichealthpolicy/healthpolicy/65896/>
 - ***GOP Focus on Premiums Eclipses Broader Issue of Health Care Costs.*** “Republican efforts to overhaul the Affordable Care Act are increasingly focused on reducing insurance premiums, an approach that’s likely to omit broader steps toward lowering overall health care costs for Americans. Beyond rising insurance premiums, Americans have seen higher out-of-pocket costs for health care, in part due to rising deductibles. The costs of certain individual health goods and services also tend to increase annually; the ballooning prices of medicines have received particular scrutiny.”
 - To read more: <https://morningconsult.com/2017/06/07/with-gop-focus-on-premiums-broader-issue-of-health-care-costs-sidelined/>
 - ***Tiberi leads subcommittee hearing on integrated, coordinated Medicare delivery models.*** “A subcommittee hearing convened by U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi (R-OH) on Wednesday explored ways to reform Medicare Advantage programs in order to improve the delivery of care to seniors and those living with disabilities. The hearing was part of the subcommittee’s ongoing efforts to explore integrated care delivery systems for seniors, including those that Congress will have to consider extending this year.”
 - To read more: <https://riponadvance.com/stories/tiberi-leads-subcommittee-hearing-integrated-coordinated-medicare-delivery-models/>
- **Week Ahead:**
 - ***Senate GOP sees path to ObamaCare repeal.*** “A path is emerging for Senate Republicans to pass their ObamaCare repeal bill, even though there are major obstacles ahead. Critically, Senate moderates are indicating that they can agree to ending the additional federal funds for ObamaCare's expansion of Medicaid, albeit on a slower timetable than other Republicans want. A compromise on Medicaid funding would remove one of the biggest obstacles for the bill.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/337199-senate-gop-sees-path-to-obamacare-repeal/>

- ***House GOP Leaders Schedule More Health Care Votes.*** “As the House waits on the Senate to come up with its version of a bill to partially repeal and replace the 2010 health care law, GOP leaders on Thursday announced the chamber would move some health care bills that are part of the third phase of its overhaul strategy. The American Health Care Act (AHCA) that the House passed in May was meant to be one of three phases of the effort because of limitations Republicans face in moving the measure through the budget reconciliation process. That process has prevented Republicans from advancing policies they typically all agree on, like allowing insurers to sell across state lines, GOP leaders have argued.”
 - To read more: <http://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/house-gop-leaders-schedule-more-health-care-votes/>

- ***Democrats Stick to Health Care Message Amid Russian Intrigue.*** “Despite the daily drip about Russia and the Trump administration, national Democrats who hope to exploit Republicans’ vulnerabilities in 2018 are focusing their messaging squarely on health care before the July 4 recess. Just minutes after former FBI Director James B. Comey concluded his testimony Thursday before the Senate Intelligence Committee – in which he said the president lied to the American people – the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee blasted out a release. The subject? Nevada Sen. Dean Heller’s reported support for phasing out Medicaid expansion.”
 - To read more: <http://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/democrats-healthcare-message-russia#sthash.hVdpc4kM.dpuf/>

- ***Capitol Hill Debate Over Drug Prices Shifts to PBMs.*** “While lawmakers continue to disagree about the pharmaceutical industry’s role in soaring prices for medicines, there are bipartisan calls on Capitol Hill to probe the middlemen in the distribution chain: pharmacy benefit managers. The new focus comes amid an effort by the drug industry to shift the blame from drugmakers, which have faced the brunt of the public backlash for exorbitant pricing, by exposing what it considers opaque business practices by PBMs.”
 - To read more: <https://morningconsult.com/2017/06/12/capitol-hill-debate-drug-prices-shifts-pbms/>

Regulatory Updates

- ***CMS Health Insurance Exchanges Trends Report: High Premiums and Disruptions in Coverage Lead to Decreased Enrollment in the Health Insurance Exchanges.*** “This brief presents an analysis of consumers who canceled or terminated Health Insurance Exchange coverage in 2017. Specifically, it examines enrollment as it relates to affordability, financial assistance and plan choice. The analysis shows that lack of affordability, increased premiums and insurance coverage disruptions are factors that determine whether consumers will purchase and maintain health coverage on the Health Insurance Exchanges.”

- To read more: <https://downloads.cms.gov/files/cost-disruptions-trends-report-06-12-17.pdf>
- ***CMS seeks public input on reducing the regulatory burdens of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA).*** “The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) today issued a Request for Information (RFI) seeking recommendations and input from the public on how to create a more flexible, streamlined approach to the regulatory structure of the individual and small group markets. Our goal through this process is to identify and eliminate or change regulations that are outdated, unnecessary, or ineffective; impose costs that exceed benefits; or create inconsistencies that otherwise interfere with regulatory reform initiatives and policies.”
 - To read more: <https://www.cms.gov/Newsroom/MediaReleaseDatabase/Press-releases/2017-Press-releases-items/2017-06-08.html>

Articles of Interest

- ***Opinion: Expanding access, supporting research and sustaining Medicare for individuals with Kidney Disease.*** “Though our nation, and our politics, has become increasingly divided over the years, there are some issues that still unite both sides of the aisle. Caring for Americans living with kidney disease and kidney failure has been one of those unifying issues. These health conditions are so fundamentally life-altering and indiscriminate that both Republicans and Democrats have long found common ground in helping those Americans affected – and have continued to do so for four decades and counting.”
 - To read more: <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/337316-expanding-access-supporting-research-and-sustaining-medicare/>
- ***1 in 7 Americans Has Kidney Disease: CDC.*** “Thirty million American adults have chronic kidney disease -- but many don't know it. That rate -- one in seven -- is higher than previously estimated, according to an analysis of data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The findings, based on 2011-2014 statistics, should "serve as a warning bell that a major public health challenge is right in front of our eyes and more must be done to address it," Kevin Longino, CEO of the National Kidney Foundation, said in a news release from the group.”
 - To read more: https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_166431.html
- ***Kidney Disease Awareness: Valuable Resources for Providers and Patients.*** “Medscape recently published an article indicating that 10% of individuals worldwide are unaware that they have kidney disease. With so many affected, where can providers turn to get more information and the essential care and treatment for their patients? We interviewed Joseph Vassalotti, MD, chief medical officer for the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), to talk about several recent campaigns launched to raise kidney awareness and a new online microsite for enrolling patients in kidney clinical trials.”
 - To read more: <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/880987/>

- ***Your tax money at work: patients admit ambulance dialysis rides not necessary.***
 “Thousands of Georgians require dialysis to do what their kidneys cannot -- clean their bodies of toxins. Some of those patients admitted to the FOX 5 I-Team they don't really need expensive taxpayer-funded ambulance rides to get to their dialysis appointments. This sort of pricy non-emergency ambulance service is supposed to be restricted to people who cannot get to dialysis any other way without putting their health in danger. Yet three times a week, a Caring Hands ambulance pulled up to the homes of Georgians who say they didn't need it. And those patients say Medicare paid for the trip.”
 - To read more: <http://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/i-team/259481546-story/>
- ***Amazon poised to deliver disruption in medical supply industry.*** “Amazon is on the healthcare industry's doorstep. The e-commerce giant continues to transform virtually every segment of the economy as it leverages its massive distribution network to deliver logistical harmony. With a stronghold on the consumer market, Amazon is eyeing the business-to-business segment as it builds its seller base. Soon, that familiar smiling brown box will make its way from porches to providers' front doors and that may make for some disgruntled medical supply distributors.”
 - To read more:
<http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20170610/MAGAZINE/170609923/amazon-poised-to-deliver-disruption-in-medical-supply-industry/>

Hearings and Markups

Tuesday, June 13th

- The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee holds a hearing on “The Cost of Prescription Drugs: How the Drug Delivery System Affects What Patients Pay.”
 - 10:00 a.m., 430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
- The Senate Indian Affairs Committee holds a hearing on H.R. 1250, a bill to amend the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to improve the recruitment and retention of employees in the Indian Health Service, restore accountability in the Indian Health Service, improve health services, and for other purposes, and two other bills.
 - 2:30 p.m., 628 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Wednesday, June 14th

- The Health Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee holds a hearing on “Examining the Extension of Safety Net Health Programs.”
 - 10:15 a.m., 2322 Rayburn House Office Building
- The Senate Special Aging Committee holds a hearing on “Military Caregivers: Families Serving for the Long Run.”
 - 2:30 p.m., 106 Dirksen Senate Office Building
- The Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee holds a hearing on “FY2018 Budget for Veterans’ Programs and FY2019 Advance Appropriations Requests.”
 - 2:30 p.m., 418 Russell Senate Office Building

Thursday, June 15th

- Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations Committee holds a hearing on proposed budget estimates and justification for FY2018 for the Health and Human Services Department.
 - 10:00 a.m., 130 Dirksen Senate Office Building