

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Weekly Capitol Hill Update – Wednesday, June 5, 2019

Congressional Schedule

Senate

- Senate is in Session all week.

House

- House is in session until June 6.

Legislative Update

- **Week in Review**
 - ***U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce Hearing on “Investing in America’s Health Care”:*** “The Health Center Program provides grant funding to health centers that serve medically underserved populations. These grants provided 18 percent of total revenue for health centers in 2017, the most recent year for which data is available. Health centers also rely on other federal funding sources including Medicaid and Medicare, which provided 45 percent and seven percent of health center revenue respectively in 2017.”
 - https://energycommerce.house.gov/sites/democrats.energycommerce.house.gov/files/documents/HE%20Sub%20Briefing%20Memo%206.4.2019_Investing%20in%20America%27s%20Health%20Care.pdf
 - <https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/hearing-on-investing-in-america-s-health-care>
 - ***Senate report reveals nearly 400 troubled nursing homes:*** “The federal government for years has kept under wraps the names of hundreds of nursing homes around the country found by inspectors to have serious ongoing health, safety or sanitary problems. Nearly 400 facilities nationwide had a “persistent record of poor care” as of April, but they were not included along with a shorter list of homes that get increased federal scrutiny and do have warning labels, according to a Senate report released Monday.”
 - <https://www.apnews.com/f1f93e5f11634ba994dfd21bbc32e73b>

- *'Medicare for All' gets new boost from high-ranking House Dem:* “Assistant House Speaker Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) on Tuesday announced his support for "Medicare for All" legislation, becoming the highest-ranking Democrat to co-sponsor the bill. The bill from Reps. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) and Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) now has 112 co-sponsors in the House.”
 - <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/446830-medicare-for-all-gets-new-boost-from-high-ranking-house-dem>
- **Week Ahead**
 - *White House runs into health-care industry hostility as it plans executive order:* “President Trump is preparing to issue an executive order to foster greater price transparency across a broad swath of the health-care industry as consumer concerns about medical costs emerge as a major issue in the lead-up to next year’s presidential election. The most far-reaching element favored by the White House aides developing the order would require insurers and hospitals to disclose for the first time the discounted rates they negotiate for services, according to health-care lobbyists and policy experts familiar with the deliberations.
 - https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/white-house-runs-into-health-care-industry-hostility-as-it-plans-executive-order/2019/05/29/a7ce7f2e-817e-11e9-bce7-40b4105f7ca0_story.html?utm_term=.b4490da5e750

Regulatory and Administration Update

- *Obamacare rate hikes appear modest for 2020:* “Premium increases in the law’s marketplaces are on track to be relatively modest for the second straight year, according to the first batch of 2020 rates proposed by insurers. The rate filings are an early indication that this year’s small rate hikes weren’t a fluke and that other Trump administration policies — including support for a lawsuit that could torch the Affordable Care Act — have proven less disruptive than some experts feared. “It seems like things have stabilized,” said James Whisler, a principal with Deloitte Consulting who works with insurers on rate setting.”
 - <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/06/03/obamacare-rate-hikes-appear-modest-for-2020-1497115>
- *Supreme Court rules against Obama-era provision on Medicare reimbursements:* “The court ruled 7-1 to vacate the rule, with Justice Neil Gorsuch writing the majority opinion. Justice Stephen Breyer was the sole dissenting member of the court, and Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the newest member of the court, was not involved in the case. The highly technical ruling and dispute involves billions of dollars in Medicare payments to hospitals. The court ruled for hospitals that had sued over the 2014 policy, which reduced their payments for serving low-income patients because of a change to the payment formula.”

- <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/446608-supreme-court-rejects-obama-era-rule-change-on-medicare>
- ***Mired In Medical Debt? Federal Plan Would Update Overdue-Bill Collection Methods:*** “This month, the CFPB proposed a rule to frame what debt collectors are allowed to do when pursuing many types of overdue bills, including medical debt. Federal law already prohibits debt collectors from harassing consumers or contacting them before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m., among other things. But the law, which was passed in 1977, didn’t anticipate emails and text messages. The CFPB’s proposal clarifies how debt collectors can use these communication tools. And it would allow consumers to opt out of being contacted this way.”
 - <https://khn.org/news/mired-in-medical-debt-federal-plan-would-update-overdue-bill-collection-methods/>
- ***Former Trump refugee director to depart HHS:*** “Scott Lloyd, whose nearly two-year tenure leading the Department of Health and Human Services refugee office sparked lawsuits and congressional inquiries, will leave the Trump administration next week, HHS announced Wednesday. Lloyd ran the refugee office for most of 2017 and 2018 as HHS was taking custody of thousands of migrant children separated from their families under the administration's zero-tolerance border enforcement policy. The administration struggled to reunite those families after a federal court order, and House Democrats this year have probed Lloyd’s role in the separations and whether his testimony before Congress was truthful.”
 - <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/05/29/scott-lloyd-leaves-hhs-1346421>

Articles of Interest

- ***CVS to expand HealthHUB concept to 1,500 stores:*** “CVS Health on Tuesday announced it will expand its HealthHUB concept to 1,500 stores by 2021. HealthHUBs offer more services than traditional CVS pharmacies, including expanded health clinics with a lab for blood testing and health screening. The stores also feature wellness rooms for yoga and seminars and offer on-scene dietitians and respiratory specialists. The initiative to further develop its stores is part of CVS's \$70 billion acquisition of health insurer Aetna.”
 - <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/446847-cvs-to-expand-healthhub-concept-to-1500-stores>
- ***Tracking Microbes People Carry May Predict Future Health:*** “There's lots of research identifying the thousands of species that inhabit our bodies and interact in ways important for health, such as good digestion. Microbiomes start forming at birth and are different depending on whether babies were born vaginally or via C-section. And they change with age and different exposures, such as a course of antibiotics that can wipe out friendly bacteria along with infection-causing ones. But cataloging differences in microbes in healthy and unhealthy people isn't enough information. What jobs do the bugs perform? Do they temporarily rev up or shut down if you get an infection or become pregnant or put on 20 pounds? When is a shift in your microbiome not just temporary but bad for long-term health — and is it possible to fix?”

- <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2019/05/29/health/ap-us-med-tracking-microbes.html>
- ***Let's change the rules for organ donations – and save lives:*** “There are three ways to donate organs for transplantation. One is through living donation, whereby a person donates an organ that he or she can live without, such as a kidney or a portion of the liver. The second, most common way, is brain death donation, in which the donor is pronounced legally dead based on irreversible loss of brain function and brain stem reflexes. The heart continues to beat, allowing for the organs to be preserved. The third method described above, DCDD, applies to donors who have brain function deemed incompatible with life but don't meet all criteria for brain death. In these cases, life support is removed, and if the donor's heart stops beating within a certain window of time, a physician declares death, after which a surgeon can recover the organs.”
 - https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-could-save-lives-by-taking-organs-when-death-is-imminent-why-arent-we/2019/05/29/15fe831e-7594-11e9-b3f5-5673edf2d127_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c151714228db
- ***Quest Says Millions of Patient Records Exposed in Data Hack:*** “Quest said in a securities filing that it had been informed of the breach by American Medical Collection Agency, an Elmsford, New York-based collections firm. For eight months, an unauthorized user had access to personal information including credit card numbers and bank accounts, medical information, and personal information such as Social Security numbers. Quest, which operates medical testing centers around the U.S., said it has suspended sending collections requests to AMCA and is working with law enforcement and with UnitedHealth on the effects of the breach. Quest said it was informed of the incident on May 14.”
 - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-03/quest-says-millions-of-patient-records-exposed-in-billing-hack>
- ***Viral study suggests an approach that may decrease kidney damage in transplant patients:*** “While studying one of the smallest DNA viruses known, Sunnie Thompson, Ph.D., may have found a new way to help prevent kidney damage following organ transplant. The University of Alabama at Birmingham researcher studies BK polyomavirus, a major source of kidney damage and rejection in transplant recipients. Nearly all humans silently harbor polyomaviruses in their bodies; but when transplant recipients receive drugs to suppress their immune system to prevent graft rejection, the virus can reactivate, resulting in damage to the kidney.”
 - https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-05/uoa-vss052919.php