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WASHINGTON UPDATE

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ENA Weighs-In With Congressional Leaders As ‘Repeal-and-Replace’ Begins

The U.S. Congress, with the support of the incoming Trump Administration, has indicated they will move quickly in the 115th Congress to make major changes to the U.S. health care system, including the repeal and possible replacement of the Affordable Care Act. The Republican Party controls both the Senate and the House, thereby giving them control of the chairmanship of every congressional committee and the ability to set the legislative agenda in both chambers. They have stated that their top legislative priority is repeal of the ACA.

Depending on the replacement health plan that is passed, a repeal of the ACA could lead to more than 20 million Americans losing health insurance coverage. Many of these patients, especially those who gained coverage through the expansion of Medicaid, utilize emergency departments for many of their health care needs. In fact, in states that expanded Medicaid pursuant to the ACA, there was a 31 percent decrease in uninsured ED visits. There was a corresponding increase in Medicaid-paid ED visits in those states.

ENA recently submitted [a letter](#) to House and Senate leadership detailing ENA’s position with respect to the possible changes to the U.S. health care system. It focuses on principles of importance to maintaining access to affordable, high-quality emergency care.

VA Finalizes Rule Expanding Practice Authority for APRNs

In an effort to increase access to primary care and decrease waiting times for our nation’s veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has granted veterans direct access to its estimated 5,000 advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). In recent years, the VA has been mired by accusations of mismanagement, as it became known that some veterans had to wait days, weeks and even months for treatment and basic primary care. Health care organizations, like ENA, [commented](#) this summer in support of the rule providing advanced practice nurses, such as nurse practitioners and clinical nurse specialists, with full practice authority at VA. These groups argued, successfully, that these professionals can help improve access to high-quality care for veterans.

“This rule-making increases veterans’ access to VA healthcare by expanding the pool of qualified healthcare professionals who are authorized to provide primary healthcare and other related healthcare services to the full extent of their education, training, and certification, without the clinical supervision of physicians,” the VA said in a [summary of the final rule](#).

Ebola Vaccine Effective, WHO Finds

In a major trial led by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Guinea, an experimental Ebola vaccine was highly protective against the deadly virus and the first to prevent infection from the pathogen.

According to a [WHO press release](#), no Ebola cases were recorded 10 days or more after vaccination among the 5,837 people who received the vaccine in 2015. In comparison, 23 cases in the same time frame among those who did not receive the vaccine. The trial was led by WHO, together with Guinea’s Ministry of Health, Medecins sans Frontieres and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, in collaboration with other international partners. The vaccine, which was developed in Canada, is currently being fast-tracked through U.S. and European regulatory agencies.

HHS Details Successes of Patient Safety Efforts

A report released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shows hospital-acquired conditions dropped 21 percent with 3 million fewer adverse events over a five-year period. [According to the report](#), approximately 125,000 fewer patients died due to hospital-acquired conditions and more than \$28 billion in healthcare costs were saved from 2010 through 2015. Hospital-acquired conditions are those a patient develops while in the hospital being treated for something else. The data was compiled and analyzed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). These successes are the result of a nationwide effort to improve patient safety which includes programs stemming from the Affordable Care Act.

HHS selected specific conditions as focus areas because they occur frequently and appear to be largely preventable, based on existing evidence. Hospital-acquired conditions selected include adverse drug events, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, central line associated bloodstream infections, pressure ulcers, and surgical site infections, among others.

Zika Update: New Data Supports Screening for Zika in US Pregnancies

In ongoing research and updated data, about 6% of U.S. pregnancies with Zika infection were linked to birth defects, more than 4,100 pregnant women in the U.S. and its territories have been infected and Zika may continue to worsen after birth.

In [new research](#) published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), researchers reviewed 442 completed pregnancies. Of those, 26 fetuses and infants had birth defects, including severe brain damage, linked to the Zika virus. It’s the first study to estimate the number of children affected by Zika born to mothers infected with the virus. The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) puts the number on Zika-infected pregnant women in the United States and its territories at more than 4,100. The CDC warns that because the virus is asymptomatic in many adults, this number may actually be much higher. In addition to showing Zika may continue to worsen after birth in the fetal brain, the CDC’s newly released findings show it can also persist in the mother’s placenta.