

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

March 2021-2



**From the Editor:** When he took office 1/20, President Joe Biden declared war on Covid-19. This issue of **TMR** focuses on the battle to control the pandemic and the help that's on its way. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[Fighting COVID on three fronts](#), by Jennifer Lubell, Modern Healthcare, 2/28/21

**TMR Topline™** - Western Pennsylvania's largest health

system has continuously applied new learnings in its battle against Covid-19. Here are three:

**General Masking.** UPMC took a closer look at its mask strategy. *"Meaning, how many people had been fit-tested for N-95 masks? How available were they? Did we have the best solutions?"* said UPMC Chief Quality Officer Tami Minnier. UPMC learned their degree of preparedness needed to be a notch higher on an ongoing basis.

**Contact tracing.** UPMC created a contact tracing app that has allowed the health system to stay ahead on Covid exposures and reduce or prevent outbreaks.

Nearly all employee exposures came from community events outside of work. *"Our contact tracing app really allowed us to contain things quickly,"* Minnier said.

**Mass vaccination.** UPMC had researched ways to accelerate mass vaccinations, testing its approaches with the influenza vaccines. When the pandemic began, the health system had a structure in place to mass vaccinate its employees and workers in nearby health systems. As of mid-February, 80% of UPMC's 90,000 healthcare employees had completed their first dose and most had received their second.



[Do Vaccines Help COVID Long-Haulers?](#), by Kristina Fiore, MedPage Today 3/4/21

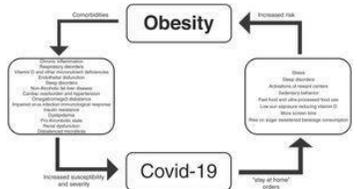
**TMR Topline™** - Some people suffering from long Covid have found significant symptom relief after their first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. New York Times Editorial Board member Mara Gay is one, feeling significantly better after her first vaccine dose. Hannah Davis, co-chief of [Patient-Led Research for COVID-19](#), said her organization is currently working on a survey to study the phenomenon. In a UK survey, 16% of patients said their long Covid symptoms had improved by 2 weeks after their first dose. Akiko Iwasaki, PhD, of Yale University believes that a study is worth considering, given that it could potentially confirm vaccination as a therapy for long Covid. Last June, Iwasaki proposed three potential mechanisms for long Covid: a persistent viral reservoir; viral fragments or remnants that drive inflammation; or an autoimmune response induced by the infection. Stanley Weiss, MD, an infectious disease specialist and epidemiologist at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, agrees: *"The way you progress in science and medicine, is that you take observations from astute observers and pursue them with scientific rigor."*



[Novavax vaccine 96% effective against original coronavirus, 86% vs British variant in UK trial](#), by

Dania Nadeem, Carl O'Donnell, Reuters, 3/11/21  
**TMR Topline™** - A late-stage trial in the UK found Novavax's vaccine 96% effective against Covid-19's original variant and 86% effective in protecting against the more contagious B.1.1.7 variant. In South Africa, it was 55% effective, but still fully prevented severe illness. The UK trial enrolled more than 15,000 people aged 18 to

84, assessing the vaccine's efficacy during a period with high transmission of the UK virus variant now circulating widely. Novavax expects data from a 30,000-person trial in the United States and Mexico by early April. The vaccine could be cleared for use in the United States as soon as May if U.S. regulators decide the UK data is enough to make a decision.



[Most virus deaths recorded in nations with high obesity levels: analysis](#), by

Joseph Choi, the Hill, 03/04/21

**TMR Topline™** - The World Obesity Federation's annual [report](#) found a connection between increased Covid-19 deaths and high obesity rates. *"Comparing countries around the globe we find a close association between deaths from Covid-19 and the prevalence of overweight in the adult population,"* the WOF said in its analysis of the research. The WOF is associated with the World Health Organization and found that the connection between increased risk of severe Covid-19 cases or death and higher bodyweight was observed across multiple countries. A US study reported that obese people were twice as likely to be hospitalized with Covid-19 and six times more likely to die after developing the disease. The organization ruled out potential explanations for the correlation between obesity and severe Covid-19 cases such as old age, wealth and increased reporting, saying the link appeared to be independent of these factors.

**TMR's Take** – A Brookings Institution [study](#) looked at the difference between advanced and developing economies last year, concluding: *"a large part of the positive correlation between income and deaths per million is due to ...the age distribution and obesity."* Put simply, America's obesity epidemic will continue to plague the US as the primary public health challenge post-pandemic.



[Healthcare industry gearing up to try to find common ground with Biden](#), by Lola Butcher, Modern

Healthcare, 3/8/21

**TMR Topline™** - The healthcare industry agrees with the Biden administration: the current top priority must be the Covid-19 pandemic along with increasing insurance coverage. Biden's primary strategy to decrease the percentage of uninsured is to revitalize the ACA. Last month, lobbies representing providers, payers, and employers,

formed the Affordable Coverage Coalition (ACC) whose goal is to achieve universal health coverage through several steps. These include enhancing the ACA premium subsidies and providing incentives for more states to expand Medicaid. The ACC does not agree with two of the President's campaign promises: creating a public option that would allow people to buy into Medicare and reducing the Medicare eligibility age to 60. A 2019 AHA and FAH study suggested that a government-run, Medicare-like option would lead to nearly \$800 million in provider payment cuts over 10 years while utilization was growing. The Medicare Trust Fund is projected to have insufficient funds to cover its obligations beginning in 2024, Commonwealth Fund CEO Dr. David Blumenthal said: *"If the Congress wants to give more people the coverage that Medicare offers, there are ways to fund it—it's just a matter of finding the political will to do so,"*

Noting that telehealth has made healthcare more accessible and affordable, especially in rural communities, AHA's Ashley Thompson, Senior Vice President for Policy said: *"We are going to need help from Congress to remove some of the key barriers in order to make telehealth continue being used as it has during the public health emergency."* There is bi-partisan support on this issue as well as on drug pricing. A PhRMA representative stated that any *"government price setting"* is a bright line that the drug industry is unwilling to cross. The industry's success in vaccine development to combat the Covid-19 pandemic may give it the political power it needs to fight drug pricing controls.

The pandemic has severely strained America's healthcare workforce. The December Covid-19 relief bill authorized Medicare to fund 1,000 additional physician residency slots. The Association of American Medical Colleges predicts a shortage of up to 139,000 physicians by 2033 and sees this as an opportunity to begin to address the projected shortage. Biden's Covid-relief plan provides funding for 100,000 public health workers.

**TMR's Take** – A recent [Populace study](#) found that across race, gender, income, education, generation, and 2020 presidential vote, there is agreement on America's long-term national priorities. Chief among them: high quality healthcare as a necessity, not a privilege; an overwhelming commitment to individual rights; and upholding equal treatment for all, but not necessarily equal outcomes. President Biden created a Covid-19 Health Equity Task Force that is recommending equitable allocation of Covid-related resources and funds. The task force must also develop a long-term plan to improve data collection for communities of color and other underserved populations.