

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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From the Editor: COVID-19 deaths surpassed 100,000 this week, claiming more Americans than the Korea and Vietnam conflicts. Many states have bent the curve and gradually are reopening. This issue of **TMR** highlights some reopening advice and the unprecedented turmoil in health insurance markets as millions lose their employer sponsored insurance (ESI). To access each full article, just click on the headline.



[Tips for physician practices: managing the operational, financial challenges of COVID-19 and beyond](#), Paola Turchi, Becker's Hospital Review, 5/13/20

TMR Topline™ - MGMA's 4/14 survey found that 97% of medical practices have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, averaging more than a 55% decrease in revenue and patient volume. The article describes five federal programs to support medical practices and provides practical advice on coding, accounts receivable management, managing scheduling volumes and preparing for a second wave.



[Amid the Coronavirus Crisis, a Regimen for Reentry](#), Atul Gawande, MD, The New Yorker, 5/15/20

TMR Topline™ - The author of "The Checklist Manifesto" provides sage advice on reopening the economy. Want to have employees work safely, with

each other and with their customers? Emulate the practices at your community hospital. With more than 75,000 employees, Mass General Brigham has minimized workplace transmissions of the COVID-19 virus despite Boston being a pandemic hotspot. How? By implementing hygiene measures, screening, distancing, and masks. Each has flaws. Skip one, and the treatment won't work. But, when taken together, and taken seriously, they shut down the virus.

TMR's Take – While it may seem counterintuitive given the public's fear of COVID-19, our hospitals and doctor's offices are safer due to the precautions taken



[Eligibility for ACA Health Coverage Following Job Loss](#), Rachel Garfield, Gary Claxton, Anthony Damico, and Larry Levitt, 5/13/20, Kaiser Family Foundation

TMR Topline™ - Between March 1st and May 2nd, more than 31 million people had filed for unemployment insurance. Job loss carries the risk of loss of health insurance for people who were receiving health coverage as a benefit through their employer. This study estimates their eligibility for ACA coverage, including Medicaid and marketplace subsidies, as well as private coverage as a dependent. Most people who lose ESI due to job loss will be eligible for ACA assistance either through Medicaid or subsidized marketplace coverage. However, some people will fall outside the reach of the ACA, particularly in January 2021 when UI benefits cease for many and some adults fall into the Medicaid coverage gap due to state decisions not to expand coverage under the ACA.



[How the COVID-19 Recession Could Affect Health Insurance Coverage](#), Bowen Garrett, Anuj

TMR Topline™ - Thirty million workers filed initial unemployment claims between March 15 and April 25. The report presents national and state-level estimates of coverage changes if unemployment rates rise from pre-crisis levels (around 3.5 percent nationally) to 15 percent, 20 percent, or 25 percent. For each unemployment level, it provides a base case scenario of coverage changes and a high scenario, derived from two different estimation methods. In the base scenario an estimated 25 million people will lose employer sponsored insurance (ESI) coverage at 20% unemployment. Of them, 12 million would gain Medicaid coverage, 6 million would gain marketplace or other private coverage, and 7 million would become uninsured. In the high scenario, an estimated 43 million people would lose ESI coverage.

TMR's Take – Prior to the pandemic, 160 million Americans received health insurance coverage through their employer. As both previous articles indicate, an unprecedented number of Americans will lose ESI coverage during the pandemic. There will be significant lapses in coverage, and many will become uninsured.



[Congress said COVID-19 tests should be free—but who's paying?](#), Blake Farmer, Kaiser Health News, 5/22/20

TMR Topline™ - When Congress enacted the Families

First Coronavirus Response Act and the CARES Act, its stated intent was that COVID-19 testing would be covered and there would be no copays and no out-of-pocket costs for patients. However, it is unclear whether the laws apply to self-funded plans that may be exempt under ERISA. Many companies with such plans are operating as if they are exempt from the rules.

Compounding the confusion, the Congressional mandate does not apply to related services that the patient may have received during testing. As a result, many COVID-19 testing centers are holding off on billing, concerned about consumer outrage when a surprise bill hits their mailbox. Many are holding back billing for COVID-19 testing services due to the confusion, depriving providers of needed cash flow during the crisis.

TMR's Take – between millions losing ESI coverage and the confusion over COVID-19 testing coverage, providers are facing a billing and collection nightmare that likely will take years to unravel.



[The payer-provider disconnect](#), Merrill Goozner, Modern Healthcare, 5/18/20

TMR Topline™ - Goozner is a keen observer of American healthcare and its flaws and failings. In this perceptive editorial, he dissects the paradox of insurers doing just fine while thousands of healthcare providers face financial ruin and tens of millions of Americans are losing insurance coverage. As for America's for-profit insurers, first-quarter results were just fine and full year earnings estimates were left unchanged.

The first three bailout bills included \$175 million for providers but included no rules on the money's use and there is widespread concern that small physician practices and rural hospitals did not receive their fair share. The Trump Administration compounded the dilemma by firing the HHS Inspector General, Christi Grimm, who had worked in the OIG office since 1999.

Goozner concludes his editorial with a telling quote from Warren Buffet. Talking about recessions, Buffet likes to say, "Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked." Goozner's conclusion: "Healthcare's tide is out. Everyone is naked."

TMR's Opinion - Goozner's right! The financing mechanisms for American healthcare are broken beyond easy repair. Unlike other developed nations, America stands alone in not providing universal healthcare to all its citizens. **TMR** supports the Eichhorn-Hutchinson comprehensive universal healthcare plan whose design addresses the critical flaws exposed by the pandemic. Based on Germany's approach that provides seamless coverage through employment and the government, the E-H plan provides choice along with a public option, and reduces administrative waste, drug costs and medically related bankruptcies. It is described in detail in "Healing American Healthcare: A Plan to Provide Quality Care to All While Saving \$1 Trillion a Year," available from [Amazon](#) or [Barnes & Noble](#).