

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

April 2021-2



From the Editor: With more than half of adult Americans receiving at least one dose, the U.S. may be winning the vaccine vs. variants race to recovery. Other countries like India, Brazil and Hungary are struggling as the marathon to conquer Covid-19 continues. This issue's article summaries also include news that telehealth will be a key focus of CMS policy and the consequences of a year of pandemic-delayed preventive and emergency care. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[Biden Says Goal Of 200 Million COVID-19 Vaccinations In 100 Days Has Been Met](#), by Brian Naylor, NPR, 4/21/21

TMR Topline™ - President Biden announced that Americans have received 200 million vaccinations since taking office, double his initial goal of 100 million in his first 100 days. By 4/25, more of half of adult Americans will have had at least once shot, including 80% of those over 65. He also announced the availability of tax credits to employers who give their workers paid leave to get a shot. *"No working American should lose a single dollar from their paycheck because they are doing their patriotic duty to get vaccinated,"* Biden said. As of 4/19, all Americans 16 and older are eligible to get vaccinated.



[As Covid-19 Devastates India, Deaths Go Undercounted](#), by Jeffrey Gettleman, Sameer Yasir, Hari Kumar and Suhasini Raj, New York Times, 4/25/21

TMR Topline™ - Months ago, India seemed to have the pandemic under control after a harsh initial lockdown early last year. Now, a second wave is becoming a devastating crisis with more than 300,000 new cases each day and overwhelmed hospitals running out of oxygen. The sudden surge is casting doubt on India's official Covid-19 death toll of nearly 200,000, with more than 2,000 daily deaths. Bhramar Mukherjee, an epidemiologist at the University of Michigan who has been following India closely said, *"From all the modeling we've done, we believe the true number of deaths is two to five times what is being reported."* Interviews with staff at crematoriums throughout India confirmed that in most cases, they put *"beemari,"* or sickness in Hindi, on all the death certificates, contra to the WHO's rule that the death be recorded as Covid-19-related if the disease is assumed to have caused or contributed to it. Experts say that only about one-fifth of deaths are medically investigated, meaning that the vast number of Indians die without a cause of death being certified. Politics also may play a role. States controlled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party may face pressure to underreport, according to some analysts. In 2019, Mr. Modi's government tried to suppress data showing a rise in the unemployment rate.

Equally alarming, India's runaway surge is being driven in part by the emergence of a virus variant known as the *"double mutant,"* B.1.617. One mutation is like the South African variant, the other is like the variant that raged through Southern California, resulting in a variant that is both highly transmissible and more virulent.



[Brazil battles coronavirus with a Chinese vaccine even the Chinese concede](#)

[could be better](#), by Heloísa Traiano and Terrence McCoy, The Washington Post, 4/15/21

TMR Topline™ - Brazil has been using China's CoronaVac vaccine to inoculate its population, only to learn recently that the country was considering changes

to its vaccines to “solve the problem that the efficacy ... is not high.” Brazilian officials have said the vaccine is 78% effective in protecting against moderate and severe covid-19 cases, but 50.4% against all cases. Attempts to control Covid-19 spread have been undone by political divisions, governmental ineptitude, poverty and apathy, and the disease is claiming roughly 3,000 Brazilians a day. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has been skeptical of all vaccines, adding to vaccine hesitancy among the population.



[Hungary, despite having one of the world's worst per capita death rates, plans to ease](#)

[restrictions.](#) by Benjamin Novak, New York Times, 4/1/21

TMR Topline™ - After a month of lockdown measures to combat the virus, Prime Minister Viktor Orban is moving to reopen society. Mass vaccination, he noted, is the only way to bring the suffering to an end, downplaying the death toll and the impact on the nation's struggling hospitals. The independent news media in Hungary is not permitted access to hospitals nor are health care workers allowed to speak with journalists on the record.

TMR's Take – Sadly, the India, Brazil and Hungary articles illustrate again that when politics trump public health, people perish needlessly. At 3/31/21, Hungary's fatality rate of 214.7/100,000 was exceeded only by the Czech Republic among the OECD's 37 members.



[Prospective CMS Administrators confirmation hearing highlights Congress's desire to expand telehealth coverage,](#) by Nick

Hut, HFMA, 4/21/21

TMR Topline™ - In the confirmation hearing for Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, the nominee for CMS administrator, it became clear that telehealth will be a key part of Medicare and Medicaid policy. Said Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), chairman of the Finance Committee, “As a result of the pandemic, we've removed some of the roadblocks for people to actually get to a telehealth provider. We're going to have to make those kinds of changes permanent in addition to working on the critical reimbursement issue.” Other Committee members echoed Wyden's comments, noting that it is an area of potential bipartisan agreement. Other policy areas discussed during the hearing included surprise billing, prescription drug pricing

and the impact of deferred care caused by the pandemic. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) cited a study showing primary care visits declined by 21% in Q2 2020 compared with the previous two years.



[From Rotten Teeth to Advanced Cancer, Patients Feel the Effects of Treatment](#)

[Delays,](#) by Bruce Alpert, Kaiser Health News, 4/20/21
TMR Topline™ - As vaccinated Americans resume routine medical care, doctors and dentists are seeing the realities of pandemic-delayed preventive and emergency care. Along with stress related ailments they are finding more advanced cancer and cardiac disease and rotting and damaged teeth. Dr. Brian Rah, cardiology department chair at Montana's Billings Clinic, was concerned; some patients arrived hours after feeling chest pains because they were afraid of contracting Covid-19 by going to the hospital. “For a heart attack patient, the first hour is known as the golden hour,” Rah said. After that, the likelihood of death and/or a lifelong reduction in activities and health increases. Detroit pediatrician Dr. Gerald Mosby finds his young patients are suffering more stress, depression and weight gain than before the pandemic. Dr. J.P. Valin, chief clinical officer at SCL Health of Colorado and Montana, said he is “kept awake at night” by delays in important medical tests. “People put off routine breast examinations, and there are going to be some cancers hiding that are not going to be identified, potentially delaying intervention.” He expressed concern that patients with appendicitis symptoms like abdominal pain, fever and nausea aren't seeking timely treatment. A burst appendix involves more risk and a longer hospital stay. Arkansas optometrist Matthew Jones is seeing much more eyestrain “because people are spending so much time in front of a computer screen.”

A recent American Dental Association survey [found](#) that more than 70% of member dentists reported an increase in patients grinding or clenching their teeth since Covid. More than 60% reported an increase in other stress-related conditions, such as chipped and cracked teeth. Some providers report nearing pre-Covid office visit levels; others still face Covid resistance. Neville Gupta of Gupta Gastro in Brooklyn and Far Rockaway, New York said. “Our patients are still avoiding getting the care they need, no matter the safety precautions in place.”

TMR's Take – Until America achieves herd immunity, many will continue to defer care, likely resulting in higher mortality rates and billions in costs.