

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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From the Editor: As 2022 dawns, the highly contagious Omicron variant has overwhelmed Delta and Covid-19 cases have hit a pandemic high. The articles summarized in this issue are pandemic-related, including FDA approval of two new Covid-19 pills and CDC data failures. To access an article, just click on the headline.



[Guardian US and Kaiser Health News win National Press Club award for 'Lost on the](#)

[Frontline'](#), by Guardian US Press Office, 12/8/21

TMR Topline™ - The National Press Club has awarded KFF's Kaiser Health News (KHN) and Guardian US their Online Journalism Award for the year-long series '[Lost on the Frontline'](#), which documented the lives of more than 3,600 U.S. health care workers who died of Covid-19 after contracting the disease on the job. Over 100 journalists at KHN and the Guardian developed a [searchable online database](#) of those who died and produced a [series of investigative reports](#) to provide a window into the workings, and failings, of the American healthcare system. They compiled profiles of those working at hospitals, nursing homes and other medical facilities, including doctors, nurses, aides, administrative employees, and cleaning and maintenance staff.



[First, they ran short of PPE, then ventilators. Now, the shortage is hospital staff.](#), by Dan Diamond, Washington Post,

12/30/21

TMR Topline™ - Doctors at the Mayo Clinic are facing the same challenges as their colleagues everywhere: exhaustion, burnout and exasperation at patients who still refuse to mask up and get vaccinated. The highly transmissible Omicron variant is sickening staffers as well as patients, forcing healthcare systems nationwide to cancel elective procedures, placing patient care at risk. Staffing shortages prompted the CDC to loosen [its guidance for health-care personnel](#), allowing hospitals to immediately call back infected or exposed workers who have no symptoms, if necessary. Rahul Koranne, president of the Minnesota Hospital Association said: *"There's no more words. I've called it a crisis, I've called it a catastrophe ... calling it a perfect storm is an understatement, but that's what it is."* [Those concerns are echoed in Rhode Island](#), where hospital leaders are warning of an ["unprecedented crisis"](#) as cases climb amid significant staff shortages. Brown University's Dr. Megan Ranney supports loosening restrictions on infected workers if they take proper precautions when they return. But she's concerned that protections for healthcare workers have been consistently overlooked throughout the pandemic: *"It's become very clear that we may care deeply about taking care of others, but folks don't actually care all that much about making sure that we're safe. We were told to go to work with bandannas or garbage bags, at the height of the PPE crisis. ... And then you're told that you're expected to come to work sick and put yourself and others at risk. It doesn't compute."*

TMR's Take – More than half of those who died were under 60 and twice as many died in nursing homes as in hospitals. Two-thirds were identified as people of color. More than one third were born outside the U.S.



[Puerto Rico Faces Staggering Covid Case Explosion](#), by Frances Robles, New York Times, 1/2/22

TMR Topline™ - A December Bad Bunny concert attended by 60,000 turned out to be a super spreader

event with more than 2,000 falling ill afterwards. While more than 75% of the Commonwealth's 3.2 million residents are fully vaccinated, 40% have yet to receive a booster shot. In recent years, Puerto Rico has had an exodus of healthcare professionals from its fragile healthcare system, severely limiting its ability to manage the Omicron surge in cases.



[Russia Faces Lost Decade After Its Deadliest Month of Pandemic](#), by Evgenia

Pismennaya, Bloomberg, 12/30/21

TMR Topline™ - With 87,527 Covid-19 deaths last month, Russia's pandemic death toll has exceeded 625,000 in this country of 146 million, cutting life expectancy by more than three years according to Moscow State University demographer Vera Karpova. President Vladimir Putin said that the slump in life expectancy in the world's largest country was a threat to Russia's geopolitical standing and its economy amid a growing labor shortage.

TMR's Take – What do sparsely populated Russia and densely populated Puerto Rico have in common? Covid-19 and a fragile healthcare system. **TMR's** Editor has toured facilities in both and has seen first-hand the challenges clinicians face in providing needed care .



[New easy-to-use Covid-19 pills come with a catch](#), Associated Press, 12/26/21

TMR Topline™ - The

FDA has approved two new medications for Covid-19 developed by Pfizer (Paxlovid) and Merck (Molnupiravir) that can be taken at home in the initial stages of Covid. To be effective, both need to be taken ASAP once symptoms appear. A patient must have a positive test, get a prescription, and begin taking the medication within five days. Paxlovid was more effective in the recently completed studies, reducing hospitalization and death by nearly 90% among high-risk patients, compared with 30% for Molnupiravir. Treatments last five days. The government is buying the pills from Merck and Pfizer and providing them at no cost. Initially, supplies will be limited.

These antiviral pills are intended for patients with mild or moderate Covid-19 who are more likely to become seriously ill. Both pills were approved for adults while Paxlovid is also authorized for children 12 and older.

Merck's drug is not approved for children because it may interfere with bone growth, nor is it recommended for pregnant women due to the potential for birth defects. Pfizer's pill isn't recommended for patients with severe kidney or liver problems. Neither antiviral pill is authorized for hospitalized Covid-19 patients. Some experts question whether there will be a role for the Merck drug in the U.S. *"To the extent that there's an ample supply of Pfizer's pill, I think it won't be used,"* said Dr. Gregory Poland of the Mayo Clinic, *"There would be no reason, given it has less efficacy and a higher risk of side effects."*

TMR's Take – The two pills are a major step forward in expanding the ability to treat Covid-19 patients at home, compared with current treatment options that are given by IV or injection, typically at a hospital or clinic.



[Data Failures Keep the CDC From Seeing the Whole Picture on Covid](#), by

Drew Armstrong, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, 12/21/21

TMR Topline™ - Armstrong is part of the [Bloomberg Vaccine Tracker](#) that began the laborious task of gathering contemporaneous data on vaccine administration a year ago. The article provides clear examples of the CDC's struggle to monitor vaccine rollout and to track data on how effective they are. Former CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield expressed his frustration: *"I was quite embarrassed that everybody quotes Johns Hopkins and Bloomberg,"* he says. *"Why aren't they quoting CDC?"* Current CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky is working to make changes at the agency: *"One of the things I think we've done since I've been here is try and understand what are the questions people are going to be asking a month from now or two months from now."* Redfield says a CDC overhaul will require a substantial investment, anywhere from \$25-\$50 billion: In Congress, Senators Richard Burr (R-NC) and Patty Murray (D-WA) are drafting legislation to make broad changes at the agency. One often-heard criticism is that the agency is too academic. It has tended to *"agonize over having perfect, clean data,"* Burr said at a Nov. 4 hearing *"By the time we get their data, it's too late."*

TMR's Take – There's an old adage that applies: *"The perfect is the enemy of the good."* While the CDC is a valuable data repository for researchers, it lacks the nimbleness needed to respond rapidly in a public health emergency.