

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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From the Editor: The article summaries in this issue look at Covid-19 weight gain, the value of pharmaceutical oversight, the impact of the American Rescue Plan Act on the number of uninsured Americans and an argument that the patient should be at the center of every healthcare decision. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[Stay-at-Home Orders Linked to Weight Gain](#), by Jeff Miner, Contributing Writer, MedPage Today, 3/22/21

TMR Topline™ - A study led by Gregory Marcus, MD at University of California San Francisco found that Americans gained weight at a rate of about 1.5 pounds/month after being told to stay out of public places. Published in JAMA Network Open, the authors noted: "*It is important to recognize the unintended health consequences SIP [shelter-in-place] can have on a population level.*" Study participants resided in 37 U.S. states and DC. Marcus said the weight gain problem may persist even after SIP restrictions have been lifted.

TMR's Take – Those who have sent children off to college are all too familiar with the “freshman 15” pounds, but the “Covid 19” is far more concerning given that 36.2% of American adults were obese pre-pandemic.

TMR's previous issue noted the connection between increased risk of severe Covid-19 cases or death and higher bodyweight, citing a study that found that obese people were twice as likely to be hospitalized with

Covid-19 and six times more likely to die after developing the disease.



[FDA panel says risks of Pfizer pain drug outweigh the benefits](#), by Damian Garde, STAT, 3/25/21

TMR Topline™ - A panel of expert advisors to the FDA voted 19-1 to reject Pfizer's application for approval of tanezumab, a non-addictive injectable painkiller, concluding that its risks might out-weigh its benefits. Developed to relieve osteoarthritis pain, it has been linked to rare but serious cases of joint damage. The 31 million Americans who suffer from osteoarthritis would welcome an alternative to opioids for pain relief. However, the FDA is unlikely to overrule its expert panel.



[Fauci: AstraZeneca needs to 'straighten out' vaccine data](#), by Sarah Oweremohle, Politico, 3/23/2021

TMR Topline™ - Just hours after AstraZeneca announced its shot's 79% effectiveness against the virus, the NIAID's Data and Safety Monitoring Board expressed concern that AstraZeneca had included "*outdated information.*" NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci oversees the DSMB that assesses trial results and ratifies the board's decisions but is not involved directly in its assessments. He said that the DSMB felt the data released "*might, in fact, be misleading a bit, and wanted them to straighten it out.*" The company agreed to set things right soon.

TMR's Take – Americans should be thankful for the independent oversight of the pharmaceutical industry provided by the FDA. AstraZeneca's faulty claim that its vaccine was 79% effective was unnecessary, adding to

vaccine hesitancy. Later data confirmed 76% effectiveness. Pfizer has placed enormous resources behind development of a long-lasting, injectable alternative to opioids for pain relief, but the risks unfortunately outweigh the potential benefits. The search for a safe, effective and non-addictive opioid alternative remains as elusive as the holy grail.



[Biden Extends Health Insurance Marketplace Through Summer](#), by Chelsea Cirruzzo, U.S. News, 3/23/21

TMR Topline™ - The Biden administration has extended the exchange special enrollment period to August 15, giving consumers in 36 states three more months to sign up for coverage through HealthCare.gov. The change will allow more people to take advantage of greater financial assistance for marketplace plans under the American Rescue Plan Act.



[Will the American Rescue Plan Reduce the Number of Uninsured Americans?](#), by Sara R. Collins and Gabriella Aboulafia, The Commonwealth Fund, 3/22/21

TMR Topline™ - The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) contains the most extensive health insurance improvements for Americans since enactment of the ACA 11 years ago. With 30 million uninsured, the Commonwealth Fund looked at who the uninsured are and how the ARPA will help get them covered. 14.9 million are eligible for subsidized marketplace plans or may have an offer of employer coverage. HHS estimates that 11.2 million uninsured people had incomes that made them eligible for subsidized coverage through the marketplaces and 3.6 million had incomes too high to qualify for these subsidies. Another 6.4 million are eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) but are not enrolled. 4.8 million have incomes below the poverty level and live in Medicaid non-expansion states. They are not eligible for marketplace plan subsidies but may be eligible for their existing state Medicaid program. Finally, 3.1 million are undocumented immigrants who are not allowed to enroll under either option.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 2.5 million will get coverage through the increased financial support in the ARPA. The authors also offer several

additional policy changes that are needed to help get more people covered. These include making the ARPA premium tax credit enhancements permanent, improving the cost-protection of marketplace plans and allowing people with incomes below poverty in Medicaid non-expansion states to enroll in marketplace plans.

TMR's Take – This Commonwealth Fund's data suggest that with ARPA's enactment nearly 90% of uninsured Americans are potentially eligible for health insurance coverage. The Biden administration needs to take this message to the American public, especially in states that did not expand Medicaid. The CBO's estimate was done prior to the extension of the open enrollment period. With effective messaging, the number could be much higher.



[Healthcare leaders can't go wrong if we keep the patient at the center of every decision](#), by Carrie Owen Plietz, Modern Healthcare, 3/22/21

TMR Topline™ - The author is incoming Chair of the American College of Healthcare Executives and President of Kaiser Permanente Northern California. Her commentary is a reflection on integrity, *"the fundamental value that is one of our profession's most essential attributes."* Noting that *"it has been critical in our ability to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic," she calls for "reaffirming our own commitment to professional integrity."*

Ms. Plietz equates the meaning of integrity with advice she received from her mentor: *"If you make every decision with the patient at the center of that decision, you'll never make a bad decision."* Her advice is to *"work intentionally every day on maintaining ethical standards in every decision, communication, huddle and personal interaction. In the same way high-reliability organizations hold safety huddles, start meetings with a mission moment and talk about good catches."* While it's not easy to take the high road in all cases, she recommends *"Remaining centered on what is best for the patient and letting it guide our decisions and our relationships with our teams and communities, is our North Star."*

TMR's Take – Ms. Plietz's sound advice resonates with the Editor, who serves on a hospital Board where every meeting begins with a Safety Story and decisions are reached through the prism of what's best for the patients we serve.