

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

June 2020-2



From the Editor: The COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage globally and here in the US where fatalities last week exceeded the 116,516 American deaths in World War I. This issue of **TMR** summarizes recent articles that address questions including: Do masks matter? Does the leader's gender matter? Are drug makers price-fixing? To access each full article, just click on the headline.



[Community Use Of Face Masks And COVID-19](#), by Wei Lyu and George L. Wehby, Health Affairs, 6/16/20

TMR Topline™ - While the WHO recommends that symptomatic individuals wear face masks in public, there has been an ongoing debate as to whether asymptomatic individuals also should do so. On April 3, the (CDC) issued new guidance advising all individuals to wear cloth facial covers in public areas where close contact with others is unavoidable, citing new evidence on virus transmission from asymptomatic individuals. This study provides direct evidence on the effects of state government mandates in the US for face mask use in public issued by 15 states plus DC between April 8 and May 15. It estimates that as many as 230,000–450,000 COVID-19 cases may have been averted based on when states passed these mandates. The authors conclude: *“As countries worldwide and states begin to relax social distancing restrictions and considering the high likelihood of a second COVID-19 wave in the fall/winter, requiring use of face masks in public might help in reducing COVID-19 spread.”*

TMR's Take This study confirms the effectiveness of wearing face masks in public as a mitigation measure. Prudence suggests that the US should join Germany, France, Italy, Spain, China, and South Korea in mandating the wearing of face masks in public.



[Identifying airborne transmission as the dominant route for the spread of COVID-19](#) by Renyi Zhang, Yixin Li, Annie L.

Zhang, Yuan Wang and Mario J Molina. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, June 11, 2020

TMR Topline™ The authors studied the transmission pathways of the coronavirus by evaluating the trend and comparative mitigation efforts in the three first epicenters including Wuhan China, Italy and New York City. They found that that airborne transmission of the virus represents the most likely route to community spread of the disease. When considering the mitigation strategies of safe distancing, avoiding large gatherings and wearing a protective mask when in public, they found the most significant mitigation factor to reducing the spread of the virus was mandating face coverings. From April 6 to May 9th this practice reduced infections by 78,000 in Italy and by over 66,000 from April 17th to May 9th in New York City. Understanding the scientific basis for airborne transmission of this respiratory virus should dictate public policy to flatten the infection curve in the cities and states where hot spots are evolving. The paper does not minimize the importance of all mitigation strategies to control the spread of COVID -19 including social distancing, avoiding crowds by staying at home and, hand sanitizing are all important however these measures were started in Italy and New York City well before mandating face coverings. Wuhan China implemented all these mitigation practices as well as extensive testing and contact tracing which lowered their infection curve more rapidly when compared with the other epicenters.

TMR's Take – The National Academy of Sciences study makes it crystal clear that policy makers and political leaders throughout the US need to be aware of and respect the science of the community spread of COVID-19. Plans to reopen states and cities should heed the scientific findings on the importance of mitigation plans, especially wearing protective masks when in public areas.



[What the Pandemic Reveals About the Male Ego](#) by Nicholas Kristof, New York Times, 6/13/20

TMR Topline™ - The Pulitzer Prize winning columnist poses the question: “Are female

leaders better at fighting a pandemic?” Kristof compiled data from 21 countries, 13 led by men and 8 led by women. The COVID-19 fatality rate was 214 per million in male-led countries and 36 per million in female-led countries including Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Taiwan. Noting that “*Virtually every country that has experienced coronavirus mortality at a rate of more than 150 per million inhabitants is male-led,*” Kristof attributes the difference to male “ego and bluster” and contrasts it with the low-key, inclusive and evidence-based leadership in countries led by women.

TMR's Take –The ancient adage “Mother knows best” appears to have merit. The fatality rate in male-led countries is six times higher! In previous issues, **TMR** summarized articles citing New Zealand’s success in eliminating the virus and Germany’s performance in controlling the pandemic.

[U.S. states accuse 26 drug makers of generic drug price fixing in sweeping lawsuit.](#) by Diane Bartz and Jonathan Stempel, Reuters, 6/10/20



TMR Topline™ - The Connecticut Attorney General and 50 other states and territories filed suit against 26 drug manufacturers accusing them of

conspiring to reduce competition and drive up generic drug prices. From 2009-2016, the suit alleges that Novartis, Teva, Mylan, Pfizer and others rigged the market for more than 80 drugs including Ritalin, Xalatan, Differin, Dilantin, and Lotrimin AF Cream. Noting that generic pharmaceutical executives were in constant communication colluding to fix prices and restrain

competition, Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said. “They took steps to evade accountability.”

TMR's Take – If the allegations ultimately are proven, the companies’ conduct is the antithesis of the capitalist free enterprise system. Diabetic Americans are familiar with Sanofi and Novo Nordisk’s high insulin prices. Generic drugs are supposed to be affordable.



[Impact of Coronavirus on Personal Health, Economic and Food Security, and Medicaid.](#)

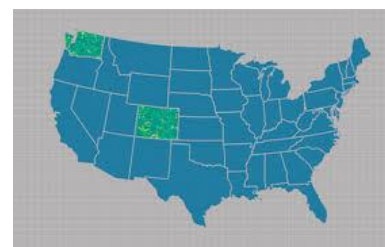
Kaiser Family Foundation, 5/27/20

TMR Topline™ - The KFF’s monthly tracking poll

had some disturbing results: Nearly half of adults (48%) say they or someone in their household have postponed or skipped medical care due to the coronavirus outbreak. Another 39% say worry or stress related to coronavirus has had a negative impact on their mental health while 31% say they have fallen behind in paying bills or had problems affording household expenses. A majority of adults (55%) say the Medicaid program is personally important to them and their families.

TMR's Take – The KFF is a trusted source for credible information and the May survey results are disturbing.

TMR will continue to monitor.



[COVID-19 pandemic weakens push for public option](#), by Rich Daly, HFMA senior writer and editor, 6/16/20

TMR Topline™ - Colorado and Washington state have either halted or slowed their launch of public option plans. The decisions to throttle back the plans were spurred by providers’ financial challenges amid the pandemic. Colorado’s plan required hospital participation and set minimum provider payment rates at 155% of Medicare rates. Washington’s Cascade Care set most provider rates at 160% of Medicare rates.

TMR's Take – The pandemic-induced delay to implement a public option is unfortunate. The Eichhorn-Hutchinson universal healthcare plan provides choice along with a public option, and reduces administrative waste, drug costs and medically related bankruptcies. [HFMA](#)