

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE
COALITION

From the Editor: With over 200 million vaccine doses administered, the vaccine vs. variants race to recovery continues at a rapid pace. This issue's article summaries include New Mexico's high vaccination rate, America's wasteful insurance bureaucracy, the pandemic's effects on children and hospital profits. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[How New Mexico Became the State With the Highest Rate of Full Vaccinations](#), by Simon Romero, New York Times, 4/14/21

TMR Topline™ - With one of the

country's highest poverty rates and lowest hospital beds per capita, New Mexico has produced one of the most efficient vaccine rollouts in the U.S.: 57% of its adult population have received at least one dose of vaccine. Experts attribute the success to a combination of homegrown technological expertise, cooperation between state and local agencies and a focus by elected officials on combating the virus. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a former state health secretary, set the tone by adopting social distancing measures from the start of the crisis despite some fierce opposition. She mobilized the New Mexico National Guard and Civil Air Patrol to operate a large vaccine distribution center in Albuquerque and staff drive-through testing sites and set up a centralized vaccine portal for all residents to sign up for shots. Native Americans are getting the vaccine at close to the same rate as Anglos in the state. Ms. Lujan Grisham said, "I fully believe New Mexico can be the first state to reach herd immunity and be the first to begin operating in the new post-pandemic 'normal' the right way, the safe way."



[Doctors say prior authorization led to life-threatening delays in care](#), by: Matti Gellman, Modern Healthcare, 4/7/21

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TMR Topline™ - A recent [AMA survey](#) found that slow prior authorization (PA) protocols contributed to care delivery delays and poor treatment outcomes for some patients during the surge in COVID-19 cases last winter. Nearly all physicians surveyed said they spent about 16 hours weekly seeking an average of 40PAs for patient care. One-third of physicians reportedly had a patient suffer a serious medical event because of delayed access to treatment and 90% said PA had a negative impact on a patient's treatment outcome. Although health plans claim that their processes are informed by evidence-based medicine, one-third of physicians disagreed. AMA President Dr. Susan R. Bailey said, "This hard-learned lesson must guide a re-examination of administrative burdens imposed by health insurers, often without any justification," calling for increased transparency in insurers' PA criteria and the streamlining of low-value prior authorization requirements.



[When money talks. Why cash pay is becoming more popular](#), by Nona Tepper, Modern Healthcare, 4/13/21

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TMR Topline™ - Sidecar Health

founder Patrick Quigley's "aha" moment came after an MRI exam when he was left with a \$1,300 bill after insurance. A few months later, needing an MRI at the same facility, he offered to pay with his debit card rather than deal with his high-deductible health plan. The cash price was just \$330. A [2019 study by Vanderbilt University](#) found that providers will cut their prices by up

to 40% for patients who pay with cash. The Covid-19 pandemic is forcing health systems to be more flexible in how services are paid for in response to changing consumer expectations. Sidecar Health is one of many startups (e.g., CashMD, Medibid, Bind) targeting millennial and Gen Z customers while leaving complex and chronic condition management to more experienced players. Several studies show that providers spend 40% of their time dealing with administrative processes that distract from patient care. Sidecar aims to expand coverage to the 15 million uninsured or underinsured, offering to reimburse consumers for the average price of their service in their market. It surveyed 120,000 doctors in 10 practice areas to create a predictive pricing algorithm that determines the cash price for 170,000 different services anywhere in the U.S. It will offer its first employer-sponsored plan next year and will eventually follow other startups into the lucrative Medicare market.

TMR's Take – Both articles illustrate the administrative waste so prevalent in U.S. healthcare. More disturbing is the potential for patient harm from insurer-driven delays.



[Estimates and Projections of COVID-19 and Parental Death in the US](#), by Rachel Kidman, Rachel Margolis, Emily Smith-Greenway et. al.

JAMA Pediatrics 3/5/21

TMR Topline™ -The authors developed a model to project the number of children who have lost at least one parent to the Covid-19 pandemic through February 2021 and estimated that 37,300 children up to age 17 had lost at least one parent. Children of color were disproportionately affected. Three-quarters of those who lost parents were adolescents. Children who lose a parent are at higher risk of traumatic grief, depression, poor educational outcomes, and unintentional death or suicide. The sudden loss of a parent to Covid-19 is traumatizing for children and leaves surviving family members ill prepared to deal with the new situation. The pandemic mitigation strategies (social isolation, distance learning, and economic hardship) leave bereaved children without the supports needed to cope with the tragedy.



[Some Children With Covid-Related Syndrome Develop Neurological Symptoms](#), by Pam Belluck, New York Times 4/13/21

TMR Topline™ – Past reports about Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) focused on physical symptoms such as rash, abdominal pain, red eyes and heart problems like low blood

pressure, shock and difficulty pumping blood. A [new](#) study from University College London's Institute of Neurology describes 46 children treated at one London hospital: 24 experienced neurological symptoms including hallucinations, confusion, speech impairments and problems with balance and coordination. Study co-author Dr. Omar Abdel-Mannan said those patients were twice as likely as those without neurological symptoms to need ventilators because they were *“very unwell with systemic shock as part of their hyperinflammatory state,”*

A majority of those afflicted were *“nonwhite,”* a pattern that public health experts believe reflects the disproportionate way the pandemic has affected communities of color. Nearly two-thirds were male, and the median age was 10. All 24 had headaches and 14 had confusion, problems with memory or attention. Six experienced hallucinations, including *“describing people in the room that were not there or seeing cartoons or animals moving on the walls,”* Dr. Abdel-Mannan said. Some experienced auditory hallucinations involving *“hearing voices of people not present.”* There were no deaths and *“almost all children made a complete functional recovery.”* The research team will follow these children to learn if any experience long-term cognitive or psychological effects. MIS-C usually appears 2-6 weeks after a Covid-19 infection, often producing mild or no symptoms. It's rare but can be serious. The CDC reports 3,165 cases including 36 deaths through March 2021.

TMR's Take – While most think of Covid-19 as an adult disease, both articles highlight the full range of emotional and physical difficulties that children can experience due to the pandemic.



[NFP hospital profitability plummeted in 2020 despite expense mitigation strategies, Moody's](#)

[reports](#), by Nick Hut, HFMA, 3/31/21

TMR Topline™ - The suspension of elective procedures and slow pace of patient volume recovery were key factors in the declining profitability of not-for-profit (NFP) hospitals in 2020 according to Moody's Investor Services, the credit rating agency. The median operating margin for hospitals and health systems was 0.5%, down from 2.4% in FY19. Management *“curtailed labor expenses and saw some reduction in supply costs as volumes declined, particularly in elective surgeries,”* Moody's reported, even though costs of personal protective equipment increased significantly. Moody's outlook for the NFP healthcare sector this year is negative.