

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

July 2020-1



From the Editor: With 4% of the world's population, America's haphazard response to the COVID-19 pandemic has produced 25% of global deaths to date. Hot spots continue to pop up throughout the South and West. This issue of **TMR** summarizes recent articles that address questions including: Does contact tracing work? Does site of treatment matter? What effect does air pollution and heat exposure have on pregnancy? To access each full article, just click on the headline.



[Parties — Not Protests — Are Causing Spikes in Coronavirus](#), by Christiana Silva, NPR, 6/24/20

TMR Topline™ - NPR's report from Washington state found that despite drawing massive crowds, protests against police violence and racial injustice in Washington state weren't among the clusters where multiple people contracted COVID-19 at the same event or location. Using contact tracing, local officials found that 14 cases (and a subsequent 15 more) were associated with a party of 100 to 150 people in early June. When asked about protests in Bellingham, the County Health Department Director Erika Lautenbach told NPR's All Things Considered: "*Almost everyone at the rally was wearing a mask, and it's really a testament to how effective masks are in preventing the spread of this disease.*"

TMR's Take - Two articles summarized in the prior issue spoke to the effectiveness of wearing face masks in

public as a mitigation measure. Whatcom County's contact tracing provides independent validation. The National Bureau of Economic Research recently released "[Black Lives Matter Protests, Social Distancing, and COVID-19](#)," which examined protests in 315 of the largest U.S. cities and found "*no evidence that urban protests reignited COVID-19 case growth during the more than three weeks following protest onset.*"



[Why Surviving Covid Might Come Down to Which NYC Hospital Admits You](#), by Brian M. Rosenthal, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Otterman and Sheri Fink, The New York Times, 7/1/20

TMR Topline™ - This

investigative article found significant disparities in care between hospitals in Manhattan compared with those in the outer boroughs. Manhattan is home to many world-renowned medical centers serving insured patients while the outer boroughs are served by a patchwork of satellite campuses, city-run public hospitals and independent facilities with higher volumes of Medicare, Medicaid and uninsured patients. At the 11 public safety net hospitals only 10% of patients have private insurance. Manhattan has 5.0 beds per 1,000 residents compared with 1.8 in Queens, 2.2 in Brooklyn and 2.4 in the Bronx. Interviews with clinicians on the front lines during the crisis detail the lack of adequate staff and equipment to deal with the tsunami of COVID-19 patients. At Mount Sinai's flagship hospital, 17% of such patients died, compared with 33% at its Queens campuses and 34% its Brooklyn campuses. Hospital executives objected to the use of raw mortality data, contending that it was meaningless unless adjusted for patients age and underlying conditions.

TMR's Take – COVID-19's disproportionate impact on Black and Latino communities has been widely recognized. However, the Times investigative story raises the issue that the place of treatment also has a major effect on mortality rates.



[Association of Air Pollution and Heat Exposure With Preterm Birth, Low Birth Weight, and Stillbirth in the US: A Systematic Review](#), by Bruce Bekkar, MD; Susan Pacheco, MD;

Rupa Basu, PhD; Nathaniel DeNicola, MD, MSHP, JAMA Open Net, 6/18/20

TMR Topline™ - The authors reviewed 57 studies from 2007 through 2019 that included more than 32 million US births and found that pregnant women exposed to air pollution and/or high temperatures are more likely to give birth to babies who are premature, underweight or stillborn. Their review strongly suggests that the toll on babies' health will grow as climate change worsens.

Other key findings include:

- ✓ The risks are higher for minority women: Black women are 2.4 times more likely to have low birth weight babies than white women.
- ✓ Higher temperatures were linked to an increased risk of premature birth and lower birth weight.
- ✓ One study found that from May to September, temperature increases the week before delivery increased the possibility of a stillbirth.
- ✓ Most of the studies concluded that exposure to air pollution was also associated with preterm births, low birth weights and stillbirth.
- ✓ Living closer to power plants was also reported as a high risk for preterm births.
- ✓ Asthmatic mothers exposed to high levels of air pollution were 52% more likely to give birth prematurely.
- ✓ The risks are compounded in minority communities that have less access to medical care.
- ✓ Minority patients tend not to receive the same level of treatment than women who live in more affluent communities.

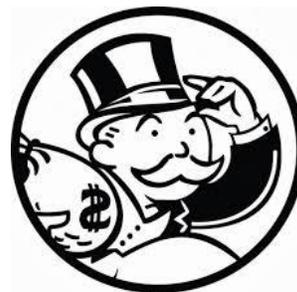
TMR's Take Premature birth and low birthweight can have lasting effects on brain development and vulnerability to disease. The authors concluded that "This really does set the stage for an entire generation." To address this growing problem, the US must reinstate efforts to control air pollution, revitalize plans to address global warming and establish fairness in healthcare through the development of a Universal Healthcare program like the Eichhorn-Hutchinson plan. None of these important efforts will be easy; however, all demand our attention.



[Pharmaceutical industry sues to block Minnesota insulin law](#), Associated Press, 7/1/20

TMR Topline™ - The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) is suing to overturn a Minnesota law that requires them to provide emergency and longer-term insulin supplies to diabetics who can't afford them, alleging that violates the [takings clause](#) of the Constitution's Fifth Amendment. The Act is named for Alex Smith, a 26-year-old Minneapolis man who had aged off his mother's insurance and couldn't afford the \$1,300 per month cost of the drug and test supplies. He died in 2017 of complications from rationing his insulin. PhRMA blames health plans and pharmacy benefit managers for insulin's high costs.

TMR's Take – When Dr. Banting and his colleagues discovered insulin in 1923, they sold their patent for \$1 to the University of Toronto because they wanted everyone who needed their medication to be able to afford it. The US is 15% of the global insulin market but produces nearly half of the industry's insulin revenues. "[The absurdly high cost of insulin, explained](#)" provides a deeper dive into the insulin pricing controversy.



[Novartis pays \\$678M to resolve suit over sham doctor outings](#), Associated Press, 7/1/20

TMR Topline™ - Acting Manhattan U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss announced that Novartis Pharmaceutical Corp. will pay \$678 million to the U.S. government and various states to settle a 2011 whistleblower lawsuit over a sham speaker program. The company admitted giving doctors cash, golf and fishing trips, and lavish meals to induce them to prescribe Novartis cardiovascular and diabetes drugs. William F. Sweeney Jr., head of New York's FBI office, called the company's conduct "*reprehensible and dishonest*," noting that "*Greed replaced the responsibility the public expects from those who practice medicine.*"

TMR's Take – Greed is not good. Novartis joins a long [list](#) of drug companies including Eli Lilly, Merck, Pfizer, Amgen, Johnson & Johnson and Abbott who have reached settlements for violating the False Claims Act and Anti-Kickback Statutes.