

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

January 2022-2

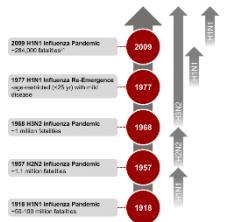


From the Editor: Welcome to TMR's 50th issue. The wildly contagious Omicron variant has peaked as Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations hit a pandemic high. The articles summarized in this issue cover the pandemic, Medicare and Medicare Advantage, and vaccine mandates. To access an article, just click on the headline.



[A WHO official weighs in on Covid, vaccines, and mistakes that were made,](#) by Helen Branswell, STAT, 1/3/21

TMR Topline – With the pandemic entering its third year, Helen Branswell conducted an extensive interview with Dr. Mike Ryan, head of the health emergencies program at the WHO, for his insights. *“What’s shocked me most in this pandemic has been that absence or loss of trust,”* he said of people’s unwillingness to follow the advice of public health leaders and government containment efforts. Looking ahead, he believes that much will hinge on what level of protection current vaccines give. The biggest collective failing has been underestimating the virus. *“In the end, the virus doesn’t have a brain. It’s just...exploiting opportunities. And we seem to have consistently and persistently given it the opportunity.”*



[Coronavirus Today: How past pandemics came to an end,](#) by Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times, 1/4/22

TMR Topline – The L.A. Times Science and Medicine Editor begins 2022 with a review of how past pandemics have ended,

starting with the **1918 flu**. After 50 million deaths worldwide and 1/3 of the population infected, the virus ran out of steam. Survivors had immunity and later mutations were less virulent. More than 600,000 Americans, mostly children, contracted **polio** in the 1900s, and nearly 10% of those who caught it died. Many who survived were left paralyzed or confined to an iron lung. In 1955, a vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk proved effective and polio was eradicated by 1979. With a fatality rate of 30%, **smallpox** dates to at least 1157 BC. Edward Jenner developed a smallpox vaccine in England in 1796, and vaccines ultimately spread around the globe and smallpox was eradicated in 1980. In the early years of the **HIV/AIDS** epidemic, roughly half of Americans who became infected with HIV died of AIDS or a related condition within two years. Deaths peaked in 1995, and effective prevention measures coupled with new medications help control the disease, but an effective vaccine remains elusive. The 2002-03 **SARS** outbreak was confined to just 28 countries due to a strong public health response. SARS stopped spreading before scientists had a chance to create treatments or vaccines. The 2009 **H1N1** “swine flu” pandemic infected as many as a billion worldwide with a fatality rate of about 0.02%. Existing medicines like Tamiflu were effective and a targeted vaccine was developed in six months,

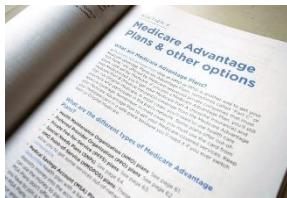
TMR’s Take – Dr. Ryan’s unvarnished view of the pandemic from a global perspective is worth a read. History is clear: effective vaccines defeat disease.



[Medicare plans to restrict access to controversial, pricey Alzheimer’s drug Aduhelm to patients in clinical trials,](#) by Rachel Cohrs, STAT, 1/11/22

TMR Topline – Medicare plans to cover Aduhelm, the controversial, expensive Alzheimer’s drug approved by the FDA last June, only for patients in clinical trials. This [proposed move](#) means some patients will not be able to

receive this drug. Researchers and physicians have raised questions about its effectiveness and Medicare is investigating whether the FDA followed proper procedure to approve it (see TMR, July 2021-3). Initially priced at \$56,000/year, Aduhelm was a major factor in [Medicare's largest-ever Part B premium increase](#), due in part to the agency's decision to create a contingency fund to pay for Aduhelm if Medicare decides to cover it. Biogen tried to mitigate the cost last month by [slashing the drug's price](#) to \$28,200 per year. HHS secretary Xavier Becerra has asked Medicare to [reconsider the premium hike](#), given the lower price. Medicare will also limit the drug to people who have mild forms of cognitive impairment and amyloid plaques, the proteins Aduhelm is designed to target, in their brains. Biogen criticized the proposed policy, saying clinical trials can take months to years to begin, and could keep underserved patients from getting the medicine.



[More employers, unions shifting retirees from traditional Medicare to MA](#)

by Nona Tepper, Modern Healthcare, 12/23/21

TMR Topline – More than 250,000 retired New York City workers and their dependents are likely to move from traditional Medicare to Medicare Advantage (MA) plans by April. The city's move to insure retirees under an [MA](#) plan is a growing trend among self-insured plans. The number of MA members in group plans sponsored by unions or employers reached 5 million in 2021, up 6% from 2020 and 132% from ten years ago. By offering retirees an MA plan through Anthem, city and union leaders estimate they will save more than \$600 million in healthcare costs. About one in five MA members were enrolled through a group plan in 2021 according to the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#).

TMR's Take – MA plans enjoy advantages that original Medicare does not have, including a 4% higher payment and being allowed to negotiate drug prices. That enables MA plans to offer added benefits like dental coverage.



[Florida regulator threatens fining hospitals with COVID-19 vaccine mandates](#)

by Tara Bannow, Modern Healthcare, 1/6/22

TMR Topline – Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration, which oversees hospitals and other healthcare facilities, sent a [notice to providers](#) Jan. 4

reminding them of a state law that prohibits private employers from imposing Covid-19 vaccine mandates. Healthcare workers fired because of such mandates can file complaints with the Florida Attorney General's office, which can issue fines of up to \$50,000 per violation for companies with more than 100 employees. Even Rochester, Minnesota-based Mayo Clinic, which is [terminating about 1%](#) of its 73,000 employees for failing to comply with its mandate, said it's holding off on firing unvaccinated employees at its Florida campus.

\$13.8 Billion

The estimated cost of preventable COVID-19 hospitalizations among unvaccinated adults nationwide between June and November.

Previous KFF Health System Tracker

Marissa Plescia, Becker's Healthcare, 1/10/22

TMR Topline – Covid-19 hospitalizations of unvaccinated adults cost \$13.8 billion from June to November 2021, according to a recent analysis by [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) of HHS and CDC data. The average cost of a Covid-19 hospitalization is about \$20,000.



1/13/22

[\\$13.8B in 6 months, analysis finds](#), by

[Supreme Court blocks Biden's vaccine-or-test mandate for large private companies](#), by Nina Totenberg, NPR

TMR Topline – The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Biden administration's vaccine-or-test rule by a 6-3 vote along ideological lines, declaring that OSHA had exceeded its authority. Justices Breyer, Sotomayor and Kagan dissented, stating that the conservative majority "seriously misapplies the applicable legal standards. And in so doing, it stymies the Federal Government's ability to counter the unparalleled threat that Covid-19 poses to our Nation's workers." By a 5-4 vote, the court upheld a regulation issued by CMS that mandates vaccines for almost all employees at hospitals, nursing homes and other health care providers that receive federal funds. The unsigned decision stated in part, "ensuring that providers take steps to avoid transmitting a dangerous virus to their patients is consistent with the fundamental principle of the medical profession: first, do no harm,"

TMR's Take – Striking down the vaccine-or-test rule will result in harm to thousands of American workers, further slowing the vaccine vs. variants race to recovery.