

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

May 2022--1



From the Editor: America's Covid-19 death toll is nearing 1,000,000 and the [WHO](#) estimates that the global death toll associated with Covid was nearly 15 million through year-end 2021. This issue also covers China's failing Zero-Covid strategy, and some medical and insurance updates. To access the full article, just click on the headline.



[Fauci: US in 'a different moment' but pandemic not over](#), by Luran Neergaard, Associated Press, 4/27/22

TMR Topline – In an interview with Associated Press, Dr. Fauci said “We are in a different moment of the pandemic.” After a brutal winter surge, “we’ve now decelerated and transitioned into more of a controlled phase,” he said. “By no means does that mean the pandemic is over.” Fauci’s to-do list: get more people fully vaccinated; develop even better vaccines; figure out the best booster strategy to counter variants; and make sure people can access treatment as soon as they need it. “We can’t take our foot off the pedal,” Fauci said. “There’s a lot of viral dynamics throughout the world and we still may get another variant which could lead to another potential surge.”



[Covid deaths no longer overwhelmingly among the unvaccinated as toll on elderly grows](#), by Fenit Nirappil and Dan Keating,

Washington Post, 4/29/22

TMR Topline – For much of the pandemic, deaths were primarily among the unvaccinated. During the Omicron

surge, the immunocompromised and the vaccinated and boosted elderly also are at an increased risk of dying. According to the CDC, vaccinated people made up 42% of the fatalities in January and February compared with 23% in September, during the peak of the Delta wave. The bulk of vaccinated deaths are among people who did not get a booster shot. Although a high percentage of elderly are immunized, vaccine potency wanes over time in older age groups.

The unvaccinated remain far more vulnerable to the worst consequences of infection. They are far more likely to die than people who are vaccinated and boosted. “*It’s still absolutely more dangerous to be unvaccinated than vaccinated,*” said Andrew Noymer, a public health professor at the University of California at Irvine who studies Covid-19 mortality. “A key explanation for the rise in deaths among the vaccinated is that Covid-19 fatalities are again concentrated among the elderly.”



[CDC: Keep wearing a mask on planes, trains, mass transit](#), by FOX 5 NY Staff, 5/3/22

TMR Topline – The CDC has restated its recommendation that Americans wear masks on [planes, trains, and buses](#), despite a [court ruling in April that struck down](#) a national mask mandate on public transportation. Anyone 2 years old and older should wear a mask on transportation and also in airports and train stations. The DoJ has [appealed the court’s decision](#).



[The Cost of Covid Zero Keeps Rising](#), by Cristina Lindblad, Bloomberg Business Week, 8/2/22

TMR Topline – The omicron variant evaded China’s border controls causing the largest outbreaks since Wuhan in 2020 with about a quarter of its population in cities under some form of lockdown. Along with a property slump, China’s Covid-Zero strategy that combines strict border controls, mass testing and quarantine of anyone infected is adversely affecting its economy. Shanghai’s 25 million

residents have been confined to their homes for over a month, and expats are leaving the city, jeopardizing efforts to turn it into Asia's top financial hub. Officials also ordered a lockdown in the tech hub of Shenzhen. The Chinese National People's Congress GDP growth target of "about 5.5%" for 2022 clearly is in jeopardy.

TMR's Take – The coronavirus continues to mutate, and each succeeding dominant mutation is more transmissible than its predecessor. The damage to China's economy is having ripple effects worldwide. All the more reason to onshore the manufacture of critical materials.



[OIG: Medicare Advantage coverage denials raise health care access concerns](#), American Hospital Association, 4/28/22

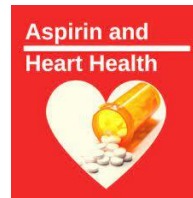
TMR Topline – The HHS Office of Inspector General reviewed a random sample of prior authorization and payment denials by 15 large Medicare Advantage (MA) organizations in 2019 and found 13% of coverage denials met Medicare coverage rules and 18% of payment denials met Medicare coverage and MA billing rules. The OIG said CMS should take steps to prevent Medicare Advantage organizations from denying coverage and payment for medically necessary care.



[Change at the top for Biogen after Alzheimer's drug flops](#), Associated Press, 5/3/22

TMR Topline – Less than a year after its launch of its controversial Alzheimer's drug Aduhelm, Biogen is replacing CEO Michel Vounatsos and "substantially eliminating" spending on Aduhelm as part of a \$1 billion cost-saving plan.

TMR's Take – The OIG report on MA plans denying medically necessary care comes on top of MedPAC's report that "a major overhaul of MA policies is needed." (See **TMR** April 2022-1, "Medicare's Disadvantage") Last month's CMS decision to limit Aduhelm coverage solely to randomized clinical trials authorized by the NIH most likely led to Biogen's decision. The company's initial pricing of \$56,000/year for a drug with mixed results could have cost Medicare upwards of [\\$50 billion annually](#).



[Older adults shouldn't start a routine of daily aspirin, task force says](#), by Allison Aubrey and Will Stone, NPR, 4/26/22

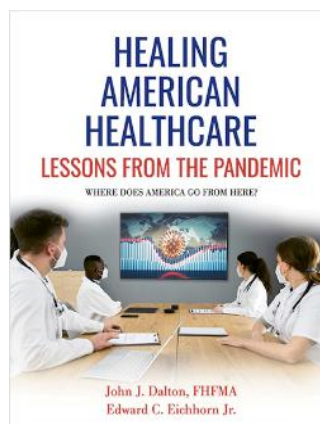
TMR Topline – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force says people over the age of 60 should not start taking daily, low-dose aspirin to prevent cardiovascular events like heart attacks or strokes. It concluded that initiating daily aspirin in adults 60 years or older has "no net benefit," and increases a person's risk of internal bleeding. The recommendation doesn't apply to people who've already had a heart attack or stroke. Given increased bleeding risk with age, patients may need to consider stopping daily aspirin use at about 75.



[Nine respiratory cancers added to list of illnesses presumed caused by burn pit smoke](#), by Leo Shane III, Military Times, 4/25/22

TMR Topline – VA officials have added 9 respiratory cancers to the list of illnesses presumed [caused by burn pit exposure](#) in Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas locations over the last 32 years. VA Secretary Denis McDonough called the move overdue. "Veterans who suffer from rare respiratory cancers associated with their service deserve the very best America has to offer, but they've had to wait for the care and benefits they deserve for far too long," he said. "That ends now."

TMR's Take – Sadly, burn pits may be the Agent Orange of 21st century war. Kudos to VA leadership for its timely response that stands in marked contrast to the lengthy battle that Vietnam veterans had to wage before the U.S. government recognized a host of conditions associated with exposure to the herbicide.



"Healing American Healthcare: Lessons from the Pandemic" portrays Covid-19's devastating impact on healthcare through the eyes of the journalists who reported on it. It's available in both softcover and eBook versions at a big discount for a limited time. [Click here](#) to buy it today!