

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

September 2022-3



From the Editor: Contrary to President Biden's declaration, the pandemic is not over although the World Health Organization sees that the end is in sight. This winter's flu season could be severe and drug pricing remains a front-burner issue. On a positive note, US poverty and uninsured rates have dropped. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[End of COVID pandemic is 'in sight' - WHO chief](#), by Manas Mishra, Reuters, 9/14/22
TMR Topline – WHO

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters at a virtual press conference "We are not there yet. But the end is in sight," noting that the rollout of vaccines and therapies have helped to stem deaths and hospitalizations, and the Omicron variant which emerged late last year causes less severe disease. US health officials have said that the pandemic is not over, but that new bivalent vaccines mark an important shift in the fight against the virus. They predict that a single annual vaccine akin to the flu shot should provide a high degree of protection and return the country closer to normalcy.



[WHO 'strongly advises against' use of two Covid treatments](#), by Natalie Grover, Reuters, 9/15/22

TMR Topline – Citing their limited

clinical activity against the latest iterations of the virus, WHO experts strongly advise against the use of the two therapies (sotrovimab and casirivimab-imdevimab). In the US, the FDA pulled sotrovimab off the market in April

and limited the use of Roche's antibody cocktail to a smaller group of patients. Both therapies continue to be recommended for use by the European drugs regulator.



[Report Details 'Massive Global Failure' in Response to Covid-19](#), by Ingrid Hein, MedPage Today, 9/15/22

TMR Topline – *The Lancet* Commission's [report](#) has called for a major overhaul to the WHO and global health policy following the estimated deaths of more than 17 million people worldwide as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It recommends that the WHO "be transformed and bolstered by a substantial increase in funding," as well as "increased and more effective investment for both pandemic preparedness and health systems in developing countries, with a focus on primary care, achieving universal health coverage, and disease control more generally." Disjointed public health systems and poor-quality public policy response in the US and Europe led to cumulative deaths of around 4,000 per million while Western Pacific countries did much better with around 300 deaths per million. Vaccine equity was cited as a key issue. In high-income countries, three out of four people have been fully vaccinated, but in low-income countries, it's only one in seven. Failures included:

- Lack of public policies to address inequitable impacts on vulnerable communities, including women, children, and workers in low- and middle-income countries
- Misinformation on social media that exacerbated inequities
- Substantial public opposition to routine public health and social measures
- Failure to draw on behavioral and social science to encourage changes in behavior.

TMR's Take: The WHO plays a vital role in global health but its effectiveness is severely limited by underinvestment in public health infrastructure that is decades behind in use of digital technology.



[Houston doctors say flu season could be early and more severe, so get a flu shot now](#), by Evan MacDonald, Houston Chronicle, 9/15/22

TMR Topline – Temperate regions of the Southern Hemisphere are often predictive of flu season in North America and Australia is nearing the end of its worst flu season in [five years](#). Flu season arrived early in Australia and Houston Methodist's [real-time flu tracker](#) indicates that the virus already is circulating in the community. According to the [CDC](#), the winter of 2017-18 was the worst flu season in the past ten years with roughly 41 million illnesses and 52,000 deaths. It recommends that everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine in the fall. It takes about two weeks for the body to develop antibodies that protect against the flu.



['Gaming' of U.S. patent system is keeping drug prices sky high, report says](#), by Berkeley Lovelace Jr., NBC News, 9/15/22

TMR Topline – According to a recent I-MAK [report](#), Bristol-Myers Squibb, AbbVie, Regeneron and Bayer have filed hundreds of patents to keep their drugs out of the hands of generic competition and prolong their "unprecedented profits." The US patent system rewards innovation by letting drug companies sell new medications and barring others from making generic versions for 20 years. But drugmakers often extend their patents by making small tweaks to the drugs, sustaining their monopolies for several years. The new report highlighted the patenting practices on a handful of blockbuster drugs including AbbVie's Humira, a rheumatoid arthritis drug, which generated \$17.3 billion in 2021 sales. Humira has 311 patent applications and 94% of them were sought after FDA approval. AbbVie's original patent on the drug expired in 2016, but it won't face competition until 2023. The Patent Office said it is working to prevent drug companies from unjustifiably delaying generic competition.

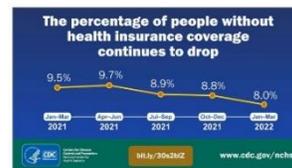


[Rebate walls may thwart biosimilar savings](#), by Alex Kacik, Modern Healthcare, 9/14/22

TMR Topline – Several biosimilars for Humira, the world's top-selling drug, are slated to hit the market next year, but the potential billions in savings may not materialize until at least 2024. AbbVie

has benefited from nearly two decades of exclusivity, allowing the manufacturer to hike the price 470% since the drug was introduced. Several FDA approved copycat versions are scheduled to hit the market in 2023 and are expected to save the healthcare system about \$5 billion a year. Biosimilars will likely be about half the price of Humira, which is \$84,000 for a year of treatment. But AbbVie may manipulate the rebates associated with Humira to limit competition by offering steeper discounts on the condition that it holds a preferred or exclusive position on a payer's formulary.

TMR's Take: Big Pharma is expert in exploiting loopholes in the patent system as well as in building complex distribution systems to block or delay generic competition.



[Poverty and uninsured rates drop, thanks to pandemic-era policies](#), by Selena Simmons-Duffin, NPR, 9/13/22

TMR Topline – The Census Bureau reports that 8.3% of Americans were without health insurance in 2021 compared with 8.6% in 2020. Medicaid enrollment was the main driver of the decrease. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act does not allow state Medicaid agencies to terminate benefits for anyone during the Public Health Emergency. This improvement may not last. "As soon as the public health emergency is declared over – which could be as early as January – that safety net that was in that Covid relief bill goes away," says Sabrina Corlette, of the Georgetown University Center on Health Insurance Reforms. "And so, we could see this historic increase in the rates of the insured be reversed." HHS [estimates](#) that more than 15 million people could lose Medicaid coverage. Census officials stressed that Social Security kept over 26 million Americans out of poverty including several million children being raised by grandparents. The Biden administration wants to make the expanded child tax credit permanent. The House passed such a measure, but it was blocked in the Senate. Americans don't live [as long or as healthy](#) as residents of other high-income countries. During the Covid pandemic most such countries had a drop in life expectancy after the first year of the pandemic but rebounded in 2021. America has not – instead life expectancy [dropped for two years](#) in a row, for the first time in 100 years.

TMR's Take: Universal healthcare for US citizens is long past due. The country is failing those who need it most.