

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

October 2022-2



**From the Editor:** Trick or treat? Too soon to tell – with concerns rising about a winter surge, the first four article summaries deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by good news for those with mild to moderate hearing loss and updates on shortages and wasteful spending. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[Biden's biodefense strategy aims to combat future pandemics](#), by Alex Gangitano, The Hill, 10/18/22

**TMR Topline** – President

Biden's [plan](#) to protect the US from future pandemics and biological threats utilizes 20 federal agencies, aiming to detect early warnings of pandemics and biological threats, prevent epidemics and biological incidents and prepare to reduce the impacts of epidemics. It lays out plans for "moonshot" efforts such as transforming early warning of pathogens through next-generation technologies, launching diagnostics for any new pathogen within 12 hours of an outbreak and developing novel vaccines within 100 days. Among other directives, the national security memorandum directs the agencies to prioritize biodefense to ensure that the government is continuously reviewing and adjusting priorities.



[Trump administration blocked CDC transit mask mandate, report shows](#), by David Shepardson,

Reuters, 10/17/22

**TMR Topline** – At a crucial time in July 2020, the Trump Administration blocked the CDC from adopting a federal

mandate requiring face masks on airline flights and other forms of transit according to a [report](#) issued by a House subcommittee examining pandemic-related issues. Both HHS Secretary Alex Azar and CDC head Robert Redfield had expressed support for the proposed order. The House report also said Trump's administration rejected a CDC plan to extend a no-sail order for cruise ships through the winter of 2020-2021.



[Cases of BQ.1, BQ.1.1 Covid variants double in U.S. as Europe warns of rise](#), by Manas Mishra and Khushi

Mandowara, Reuters. 10/21/22

**TMR Topline** – Although weekly cases have been falling recently, the CDC estimates that Omicron's BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 variants accounted for 16.6% of coronavirus variants in the US. European officials said that there is no evidence that BQ.1 is linked with increased severity compared with BA.5 but warned it may evade some immune protection. *"These variants can quite possibly lead to a very bad surge of illness this winter in the U.S. as it's already starting to happen in Europe and the UK,"* said Mayo Clinic vaccine researcher Gregory Poland.



[Long Covid at 12 months persists at 18 months, study shows](#), by Nancy Lapid, Reuters, 10/13/22

**TMR Topline** – A new study of long Covid found that patients who have lingering symptoms at 12 months are likely to still have symptoms at 18 months. These findings from a large study of 33,281 Covid-19 patients in Scotland are supported by earlier, smaller studies. The most common lingering symptoms included breathlessness, chest pain, palpitations, confusion and "brain fog." Vaccination before infection appeared to protect against some long-term symptoms. Study leader Jill Pell of the University of Glasgow said, *"Our study is important because it adds to our understanding of long Covid in the general population,*

*not just in those people who need to be admitted to hospital with Covid-19."*

**TMR's Take:** Sadly, the Trump administration's reluctance to heed its public health experts advice resulted in well over 150,000 avoidable deaths. TMR hopes that the biodefense strategy is taken seriously and implemented. Adding long Covid to the chronic diseases that providers must manage stresses an already over-burdened delivery system. Although the University of Washington's [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#) thinks otherwise, it appears that the US is headed for its third consecutive winter surge. With seasonal flu starting early and respiratory infections among children raging, providers soon could be overwhelmed by a "triple-demic."

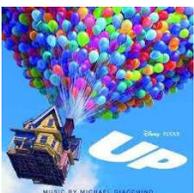


[Say What? Hearing Aids Available Over-the-Counter for as Low as \\$199, and Without a Prescription](#), by Phil

Galewitz, Kaiser Health Network, 10/17/22

**TMR Topline** – Federal officials estimate that more than [37 million American adults](#) have trouble hearing, but only [1 in 4 adults](#) who could benefit from a hearing aid have used one. After decades of complaints about the high cost of hearing aids, in 2017 Congress ordered the FDA to set rules that would enable over-the-counter sales in hopes it would boost competition and lower prices. The new category of hearing aids bypasses state dispensing laws. The [over-the-counter aids](#) are intended for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss.

Walmart said it will offer an assortment of OTC hearing aids, including some at \$199-299 per pair in Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas. Dr. Frank Lin, director of the Cochlear Center for Hearing and Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, noted that some consumers may want to see an audiologist to get their hearing tested before buying an OTC aid and get advice on which hearing aid is best for their kind of hearing loss. Walgreens, CVS and Best Buy also will be offering OTC hearing aids.



[Helium shortage raises concerns around MRIs](#), by Paige Twenter, Becker's Hospital Review, 10/23/22

**TMR Topline** – [NBC News](#) reported on a shortage of liquid helium, an element that has been dwindling in supply and is critical to

operating MRI machines. Helium supply has been problematic for many years and geopolitical tensions are making the problem worse. A new facility in eastern Russia was planned to provide a third of the world's supply, but a January fire has caused delays. Political tensions due to the war in Ukraine have halted the US' plans to acquire helium from this source. MRIs typically use 10,000 liters of liquid helium, the earth's coldest element, during their lifespan.

Donna Craft, a regional construction manager for Premier Health who contracts with helium suppliers for some 4,000 hospitals said, "*Helium is on allocation for sure. We're probably not blowing up balloons in the gift shop anymore.*" GE Healthcare and Siemens are working to develop MRIs that can run on less liquid helium. "*There's no alternative,*" Ms. Craft told *NBC News*. "*Without helium, MRIs would have to shut down.*"

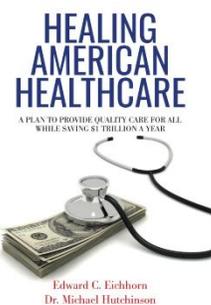
**TMR's Take:** A creative solution to keeping MRIs from shutting down is urgently needed because helium in its gaseous form is lighter than air. Once it's released into the atmosphere it is headed to outer space.



[At least half of healthcare administrative spending is wasteful, report says](#), Andrew

Cass, Becker's Hospital Review, 10/10/22

**TMR Topline** – According to a recent report in [Health Affairs](#), administrative spending accounts for 15-30% of healthcare spending in the US (\$285-570 billion) and at least half of that "*does not contribute to health outcomes in any discernible way.*" The report notes that not all administrative spending is wasteful but is "*necessary and efficient, facilitating coordination among multiple actors and allowing for a level of choice in insurers, benefits, plans, providers and procedures.*"



**TMR's Take:** In OECD member countries with universal healthcare, administrative spending rarely accounts for more than 5% of healthcare spending. The Allcare Plan described in "[Healing American Healthcare: A Plan to Provide Quality Care for All, While Saving \\$1 Trillion a Year](#)"

eliminates most administrative waste.