

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

November 2022-2



From the Editor: While Covid deaths are declining globally, seasonal flu and RSV outbreaks are filling US hospitals. The winter omicron surge yet to come, so HHS has extended the public health emergency through April. Other article summaries include two of KHN's investigative reports. To access each article, click on the headline.



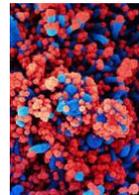
[WHO reports 90% drop in world Covid-19 deaths since February](#), by Jamey Keatenn, Associated Press, 11/9/22

TMR Topline – WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus said that a nearly 90% drop in recent Covid-19 deaths globally compared to nine months ago provides “*cause for optimism*,” but still urged vigilance against the pandemic as variants continue to crop up. Average weekly deaths dropped from 75,000 in February to 9,400 by November. He noted that testing and sequencing rates remain low globally, vaccination gaps between rich and poor countries are still wide, and new variants continue to emerge.



[US flu season off to a fast start as other viruses spread](#), by Mike Stobbe and Don Babwin, Associated Press, 11/4/22

TMR Topline – The CDC reports that seasonal flu is already hitting hard, with 22 states and Washington, DC, reporting high levels of activity. Doctors are urging people to get vaccinated for that and [Covid-19](#) ahead of the holiday season. Only 10% of people aged 5 and older have received the updated Covid-19 vaccine and just 21% of adults say they've been vaccinated against the flu.



[New omicron subvariants now dominant in the U.S., raising fears of a winter surge](#), by Rob Stein, NPR, 11/11/22

TMR Topline – Two new omicron subvariants, BQ.1 and BQ.1.1, have become dominant, accounting for 44% of new infections according to the CDC. Recent [laboratory studies](#) indicate that BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 may be seven times more “*immune-evasive*” than BA.5, which accounted for 30% of new infections last week.



[HHS to extend Covid-19 public health emergency through April](#), by Jakob Emerson, Becker's Hospital Review, 11/11/22

TMR Topline – The 12th extension of the public health emergency will extend through at least April 11, 2023. Among other factors, continuing the PHE allows fast-tracked approvals of Covid-19 vaccines and treatments, and preserves healthcare coverage for millions of Medicaid beneficiaries nationwide. “*We are hoping that the amount of immunity that has been induced either by prior infection or by vaccination*” will protect most people from getting severely ill or dying, Dr. [Anthony Fauci](#), the White House medical advisor, told NPR.



[Pediatric health groups call for national emergency to fight respiratory illnesses](#), by Nathaniel Weixel, The Hill, 11/15/22

TMR Topline – The Children's Hospital Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics have asked President Biden and HHS Secretary Becerra to declare a national emergency to help them combat the surge of hospitalizations due to respiratory illnesses in children. Capacity constraints at children's hospitals and pediatric offices are resulting in more children being cared for in community and adult hospitals, which may have limited or no capacity to care for children. Most RSV cases and other respiratory illnesses don't require

hospitalizations. But when so many children are stricken with viruses at the same time, the surge can quickly overwhelm hospitals.

TMR's Take: Is the US headed for a “tripledeemic” this winter? With RSV hospitalizations for seniors running at [10 times](#) the normal rate, a Covid surge is the last thing that the US needs. Please take precautions as you gather with friends and family this holiday season.



[Walgreens' VillageMD completes \\$8.9B deal to combine with](#)

[Summit Health](#), by Naomi Diaz, Becker's Hospital Review, 11/7/22

TMR Topline – VillageMD, a primary care disruptor, has [acquired](#) Summit Health in a transaction worth roughly \$8.9 billion. The deal combines Village Practice Management with Summit Health. [Formed](#) by the 2019 merger of Summit Medical Group with CityMD, Summit Health has more than 370 primary, specialty and urgent care locations across New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Oregon. Walgreens Boots Alliance owns 53% of VillageMD. Cigna has a minority position in the company. The transaction is expected to close in the first quarter of 2023.



[Sick Profit: Investigating Private Equity's Stealthy Takeover of Health Care Across Cities and Specialties](#)

by Fred Schulte, Kaiser Health News, 11/14/22
TMR Topline – Private equity firms are reshaping health care, sometimes with ominous results after nearly \$1 trillion spent on almost 8,000 transactions in the past ten years. More than \$206 billion was spent on 1,400 acquisitions in 2021 alone. KHN's investigation found that since 2014, PE firms have agreed to pay more than \$500 million in fines to settle at least 34 lawsuits. PE firms are being sued by whistleblowers and injured patients alleging misconduct or improper business dealings. In efforts to reduce costs and increase profits, some PE controlled companies have boosted their bottom line by violating federal false claim and anti-kickback laws or through profit-boosting strategies that could harm patients. Another tactic is to find ways to bill more for medical services while trimming unprofitable services (e.g., some PE-backed groups have set up special “obstetric emergency departments” at some hospitals that charge expectant mothers' high rates for routine perinatal care.

The KHN investigation also found PE business tactics linked to scandalously bad care at some dental clinics. Two-year-old Zion Gastelum died just days after dentists performed root canals and put crowns on six baby teeth at Kool Smiles dental clinic in Yuma, AZ. He died after being diagnosed with “*brain damage caused by a lack of oxygen.*” His parents 2018 lawsuit alleges he that was hooked up to an oxygen tank for questionable root canals and crowns “*that was empty or not operating properly*” and put under the watch of poorly trained staffers who didn't recognize the blunder until it was too late. Mary Inman an attorney who represents whistleblowers commented “*Their model is to deliver short-term financial goals and in order to do that you have to cut corners.*”



[Centene Showers Politicians With Millions as It Courts Contracts and Settles Overbilling Allegations](#)

by Samantha Young, Andy Miller and Rebecca Grapevine, Kaiser Health News, 11/4/22

TMR Topline – Headquartered in St. Louis, Centene Corp. is the nation's largest private managed-care provider for Medicaid. Since 2015, the company, its subsidiaries, its top executives, and their spouses have given more than \$26.9 million to state politicians in 33 states, to their political parties, and to nonprofit fundraising groups. Centene earns billions of dollars from governments, then uses its profits to back the campaigns of the officials who oversee those government contracts. More than 20 states are investigating or have investigated Centene's Medicaid pharmacy billing. The company has agreed to pay settlements to 13 of those states, with the total reaching about \$596 million. KHN found that Centene also pays dozens of lobbyists in state capitals across the country and in DC. Two-thirds of its \$126 billion in revenue comes from state Medicaid contracts that cover about 15 million people across the country. This long article details allegations about the business practices of Centene's subsidiaries in several states including California, Florida, Ohio and Nevada.

TMR's Take: Kudos to KHN for their excellent reporting. Both PE and corporate greed place profits above patients, driven by producing an ROI for their investors. Until the US moves to not-for-profit care models like Germany and France, it will continue to produce high-cost care of mediocre quality. Shame on us!