

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

August 2023-1



HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE  
COALITION

**From the Editor:** This issue's article summaries begin with drug and Covid updates and concludes with the struggles facing rural Americans seeking primary care. Click on the headline to read the full article. If you are enjoying this curated newsletter, please subscribe [here](#).



[Supreme Court pauses Purdue settlement, delaying payments to states](#), by Felice J. Freyer and Tonya Alanez, Boston Globe, 8/10/23

**TMR Topline** – The Supreme Court has agreed to put the \$6 billion Purdue Pharma settlement on hold to consider whether bankruptcy law authorizes a blanket shield from lawsuits filed by all opioid victims. It is expected to hear arguments before the end of the year. The US Bankruptcy Trustee opposed releasing the Sackler family from legal liability because it would apply to “an untold number of claimants who did not specifically consent to the release’s terms,” Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar said in a court filing. She added that, if left standing, the agreement would provide “a roadmap for wealthy corporations and individuals to misuse the bankruptcy system to avoid mass tort liability.” The key issue to be resolved is a controversial practice called “nonconsensual third-party release.” This occurs when parties who are not the debtors before the bankruptcy court, such as the individual Sackler family members, are released from liability without the consent of all those who potentially have a claim against them. Appellate courts have had differing views on the question, making it ripe for Supreme Court review.

**TMR's Take:** TMR stands by its comment in the June 2023-1 issue that reported on the settlement: “Purdue Pharma and the Sacklers take a financial hit, but like the

bankers who foisted sub-prime mortgages on unqualified buyers triggering the Great Recession, none went to jail.” TMR looks forward to a Supreme Court decision next year that will have broad impact beyond Big Pharma.



[FDA approves first pill for postpartum depression](#), by Aria Bendix and Marina Kopf, NBC News, 8/4/23

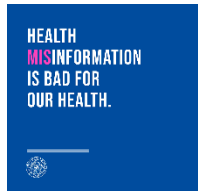
**TMR Topline** – The FDA has approved the first-ever pill for postpartum depression. jointly developed by Biogen and Sage Therapeutics. Zuranolone is taken daily for two weeks and is the first treatment that can be taken at home. The only other available treatment is [an intravenous injection](#), Zulresso, that requires a 2-1/2 day hospital stay. Women who breastfed or had mild or moderate depression weren't included in the trials. According to the CDC, about 1 in 8 women report symptoms of postpartum depression after recently giving birth.



[Novo's Wegovy shows heart benefit alongside weight loss in trial](#), by Maggie Fick and Nikolaj Skydsgaard, Reuters, 8/8/23

**TMR Topline** – Since it's US launch in June 2021, Novo Nordisk's Wegovy has transformed the weight-loss market. A recent study involving 17,500 overweight or obese people over age 45 with a history of heart disease and no prior history of diabetes had a 20% lower incidence of heart attack, stroke or death from heart disease compared to those on a placebo. US law classifies weight-loss treatments as lifestyle drugs and bars Medicare from covering them. Martin Holst Lange, EVP for development at Novo, said the landmark trial data shows Wegovy has “the potential to change how obesity is regarded and treated.” The weekly injection makes patients feel full for longer and leads to a 15% average weight loss when combined with changes to diet and exercise. Costing \$1,300/month, Wegovy may prove to be cost effective in terms of improving patients' lives, rather than lowering their total cost of care.

**TMR's Take:** The first at-home treatment for post-partum depression and a weight-loss drug that also lowers heart attack risk are good news for new moms and obese Americans. Meeting the growing demand for Wegovy will pose a challenge for Novo given that the Brussels factory that fills the self-injection pens has repeatedly breached US [sterile-safety rules](#).



### [Doctors who put lives at risk with covid misinformation rarely](#)

[punished](#), by Lena H. Sun, Washington Post, 7/26/23

**TMR Topline** – The Post looked at all 50 state medical boards to determine how they dealt with doctors who spread medical misinformation during the pandemic. Its review of more than 2,500 medical board documents, lawsuits and news stories and over 130 interviews with medical board staffers, physicians, patients, and health officials found at least 480 Covid-misinformation-related complaints. Only 20 doctors were penalized and only 5 lost their medical licenses. Many of the complaints related to doctors promoting ivermectin or hydroxychloroquine, which have been [disproved as effective](#) Covid treatments and not authorized by the FDA. State medical boards typically respect physicians' medical judgment when they prescribe drugs for "off-label" use, as long as it does not harm patients. Three states passed laws to protect doctors who prescribe ivermectin and six state AGs issued opinions that doctors can prescribe both. Federation of State Medical Boards president Chaudhry said, "The most common refrain I hear from state licensing boards is they would like to have more resources, meaning more individuals who can investigate complaints, more attorneys, more people who can process these complaints sooner to do their job better."



### [Biden administration opens new office to study long Covid response, NIH begins clinical trials](#)

by Mary Kekatos, ABC News, 7/31/23

**TMR Topline** – [Long Covid](#) is a condition that occurs when patients still have symptoms at least four weeks after they have cleared the infection, affecting about 8% of patients. The new HHS Office of Long Covid Research and Practice will [study the condition](#) and help those who have been diagnosed with it. HHS estimates that between 7.7 and 23 million Americans developed long Covid after being infected with the virus. According to the

CDC, symptoms vary and can include fatigue, difficulty breathing, head-aches, brain fog, joint and muscle pain and continued loss of taste and smell. The NIH is launching long Covid clinical trials to explore possible treatments for extreme fatigue, sleep disturbances, changes in body function and cognitive dysfunction.

**TMR's Take:** The pandemic is over, but long Covid lingers. A new [study](#) looked at DNA from 6,450 people who developed long Covid compared to DNA of those who didn't. It found some people have a version of a gene, *FOXP4*, that is associated with developing long Covid.



### [Rural Americans Struggle with Medical Bills and Health Care](#)

[Affordability](#), by Munira Z. Gunja, The Commonwealth Fund, 7/24/23

**TMR Topline** – Worldwide, rural area residents tend to have less access to care and poorer health than people in cities. The US is no different - about [15% percent of the population](#) (45 million) live in rural areas where access to care is a major problem. Recent research found that the US had more [geography-based health disparities](#) than 10 other high-income countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK). Rural Americans have higher rates of [chronic disease](#), [suicide](#), worse [maternal health](#), and limited [access to care](#) when compared to city dwellers, as well as more trouble paying for care than resident of rural areas in the other countries included in the analysis. More than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> reported skipping needed care due to costs. Nearly 25% of rural Americans had either difficulty paying medical bills or an inability to pay at all compared with fewer than 10% in nearly all the other countries surveyed. Prior research has shown the [high cost of health services](#) in the US affects consumers [with or without insurance coverage](#). The US is the only country in the study without universal healthcare, leaving more than [10% of the rural population uninsured](#) and nearly 30% underinsured. In the other countries studied, all residents have free access to primary health coverage. Complicating the problem further, the US has over 4,000 rural areas with a [shortage of primary care](#). Rural Americans are among the least likely to have adequate access to care when compared to their counterparts in the other 10 countries.

**TMR's Take:** The US is the only one of the world's wealthiest nations without universal healthcare. Rural Americans would benefit greatly from such a system.