

The Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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From the Editor: This issue's article summaries cover a potpourri of recent developments across the healthcare spectrum. Click on the headline to read the full article. If you enjoy **TMR**, please subscribe [here](#) for \$25.00 /year.



The five medical specialties with the highest average annual compensation

[Compensation Is Key to Fixing Primary Care Shortage](#), by Michelle Andrews, KFF Health

News, 11/16/23

TMR Topline – There are many reasons for the looming shortage of primary care physicians in the US with compensation topping the list. The substantial disparities between what PCPs earn relative to specialists can weigh into medical students' decisions on which field to choose. Also, Medicare and health insurers generally place more value on doing procedures than on delivering the whole-person, long-term health care management that PCPs provide. The current fee-for-service system doesn't fully accommodate the time and effort that PCPs put into "small-ticket" activities like emails and phone calls, reviews of lab results, and consultation reports. A better arrangement would be to pay PCPs capitated rates. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's [report](#) on how to rebuild primary care emphasized that without it, "minor health problems can spiral into chronic disease," with poor disease management, emergency room overuse, and unsustainable costs.

TMR's Take: TMR's Editor has been writing and lecturing about the disparity between primary care and specialist compensation for the last decade. It's not that way in our peer countries. Perhaps it's time to disrupt the

early 20th century approach to physician training as David Johnson suggests in the November issue of [hfm](#).



[The rise of the freestanding ED](#), by Alexis Kayser, Becker's Hospital Review, 11/17/23

TMR Topline – Over the past 15 years, [freestanding emergency departments](#) (FSEDs) have grown from 1% to 11% of all EDs according to the National Emergency Department Inventory. FSEDs have become popular because they can expand hospital system revenue while improving community access to care. They are convenient for patients since appointments are not needed, comprehensive care is available and wait time usually is shorter than hospital-based EDs.



[Catholic health system removes all crucifixes](#), by Alexis Kayser, Becker's Hospital Review, 11/22/23

TMR Topline – Springfield IL-based Hospital Sisters Health System is removing wooden and metal crucifixes from its hospitals' emergency departments and patient rooms in response to "the changing healthcare landscape and the general increase in healthcare workers experiencing workplace violence." Safer replacements will be installed. As patient violence rises, individual health systems and states have [taken](#) various actions to protect their workers. Healthcare and social services [report](#) the highest rates of nonfatal workplace injuries across all sectors — surpassing both manufacturing and construction by well over 100,000 incidents. Bipartisan legislation has been [introduced](#) in the US Senate that would make it a federal crime to knowingly assault hospital workers.



[Are insurers using tech to automate claims denials?](#), by Lauren Berryman and Brock E. W. Turner, Modern Healthcare, 11/21/23

TMR Topline – UnitedHealth Group and Cigna have been separately accused of allegedly using automated tools to deny some claims. [United faces a potential class-action lawsuit](#) filed by family members of two deceased MA enrollees who hope to represent a national class of similarly affected enrollees. They claim the insurer knew that its AI tool, “nH Predict,” had a 90% error rate but expected only a fraction of policyholders to appeal the denied claims. The California complaint against Cigna alleges that its procedure-to-diagnosis, or PxDx review process, was used by medical staff to deny large batches of claims without reviewing the medical necessity of each case. Both lawsuits are ongoing.



[Express Scripts unveils 'cost-plus' drug pricing model](#), by Lauren Berryman, Modern Healthcare, 11/14/23
TMR Topline – Cigna Group’s

Express Scripts plans to offer a “cost-plus” drug pricing model for its clients next year amid growing scrutiny of PBMs. Like the Mark Cuban Cost Plus Drug Co., its clients will have the option to pay for prescription medications at their estimated acquisition costs, plus a fee of up to 15% of the drug’s cost and a flat pharmacy dispensing fee. The company touts the model as an alternate option for clients looking to simplify drug pricing. It contrasts with PBMs’ typical practices of negotiating reimbursement rates with pharmacies on clients’ behalf. The PBM landscape is [shifting](#) rapidly amid [legislative interest](#) at the state and federal level in promoting company transparency and [restricting some business practices](#).

TMR’s Take: There’s an old axiom that “*Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery*” and successful Shark and healthcare disrupter Mark Cuban must be flattered.



[Torn ACLs may heal with therapy instead of surgery, though some surgeons aren’t convinced](#), by Katie Camero and Jessica Herzberg,

NBC News, 11/15/23

TMR Topline – For athletes, an ACL tear is one of the most common and debilitating knee injuries. Usually, surgical intervention can reliably get them back to their athletic activities. A recent study in the [British Journal of Sports Medicine](#) found that after following a new bracing protocol, 90% of ACL tears in 80 participants showed signs of healing on an MRI. Post treatment, many of the

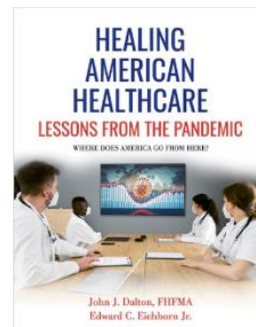
patients who were competitive or recreational athletes reported that they had good knee stability and function and returned to their sport a year later. Lead author Stephanie Filbay at Australia’s University of Melbourne noted that patients wore a brace that kept their knees at a 90-degree angle so that the torn ends of the ACL were closer together, increasing the likelihood they would fuse. Patients had physical therapy as their braces were slowly adjusted to increase range of motion, then were removed around the three-month mark. MRIs revealed that most ACLs repaired themselves. She wrote, “*We have now braced over 430 patients in clinical practice, with similarly high rates of ACL healing and excellent patient outcomes.*” Some experts aren’t convinced that bracing injured knees will lead to the long-term stability needed to prevent further injury. Orthopedic surgeon Dr. Luful Farrow of the Cleveland Clinic said, “*If a collegiate athlete has a complete tear and you send them back to sports without a surgery, it’s close to malpractice.*”



[Seniors made up 63% of Covid hospitalizations earlier this year](#), by Linda Searing, Washington Post, 11/20/23

TMR Topline – The CDC [reported](#) that 63% of patients hospitalized with Covid during the first eight months of 2023 were 65 and older, and accounted for nearly 90% of deaths. Sadly, more than 75% of them had not gotten the bivalent vaccine. Most had at least one and many had two or more underlying conditions such as coronary artery disease, diabetes, kidney disorders, heart failure and obesity. Health experts stress that [vaccination](#) reduces the odds of hospitalization, [long Covid](#) and dying. It also protects others by limiting the spread of the disease.

TMR’s Take: Wisdom is supposed to come with age, but more than 75% of the elderly who died from Covid in US



hospitals had ignored the CDC’s advice to “[Get vaccinated.](#)” The Covid pandemic exposed flaws in US healthcare delivery, placing patients in harm’s way. “*Healing American Healthcare: Lessons from the Pandemic*” published last year included recommendations to improve America’s healthcare

delivery system. It’s available in both soft-cover and eBook versions. Click [here](#) to buy it at a discounted price with coupon Printbook or ebook at checkout.