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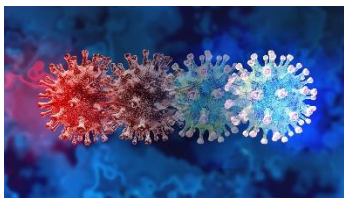
Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

February 2024-1



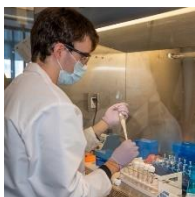
HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE
COALITION

From the Editor: The topics in this issue's article summaries include Covid, ACA enrollment, Medicare Advantage, healthcare bankruptcies and post-Roe challenges. Click on the headline for the full article. If you enjoy this curated newsletter, please subscribe [here](#).



[Covid variant JN.1 is not more severe, early CDC data suggests](#), by Alexander Tin, CBS News, 1/23/24

TMR Topline – The CDC reports that early data from hospitals indicate that the [JN.1 variant](#) is not leading to more severe disease. It now accounts for an [estimated](#) 85.7% of Covid-19 cases nationwide. The CDC's early findings about JN.1 come as the agency has begun to see a slowing of [respiratory virus trends](#) after a peak over the winter holidays. [Covid-19](#) hospitalizations this season continued to outpace influenza nationwide.



[Wastewater tests show Covid infections surging, but pandemic fatigue limits precautions](#), by Tim Henderson, Stateline, 1/23/24

TMR Topline – Wastewater testing is one of the most effective ways to detect Covid-19 spread. Although spotty and inconsistent in many places, it indicates that the current wave peaked in late December with 1.9 million daily infections, the most since 2021's omicron wave. As many as 1/3 of Americans could contract Covid by late February given pandemic fatigue's prevalence. Experts are concerned since a new infection increases the risk of long Covid. The CDC publishes a ["current conditions"](#) map for every state with sufficient data.

TMR's Take: Early in the pandemic, [Colorado State University](#) succeeded in combating community spread by sampling wastewater from its dorms each morning. Infected people start shedding the coronavirus in their feces days before shedding from their mouths and noses.



[Open enrollment breaks 21M for 2024](#), by Hayley DeSilva, Modern Healthcare, 1/24/24

TMR Topline – HHS has reported that a record 21.3 million people have signed up for health insurance in 2024 through the Affordable Care Act's marketplace, including over 5 million new enrollees. About 15% of them were previously enrolled in [Medicaid or CHIP](#) during the public health emergency that ended last year.

TMR's Take: Despite its popularity, former President Trump has again promised to get rid of the program, if elected saying that *"Obamacare Sucks!!!"* but has yet to produce a plan for its replacement.



[Older Americans Say They Feel Trapped in Medicare Advantage Plans](#), by Sarah Jane Tribble, KFF Health News, 1/5/24

TMR Topline – Medicare Advantage (MA) enrollment has grown to 30.8 million, driven in part by low premium costs and perks like dental and vision coverage. Medicare pays private insurers a fixed amount per MA enrollee, sometimes adding bonuses that insurers use to add benefits not covered by traditional Medicare. With more than half of Medicare beneficiaries now enrolled in MA plans, concerns have arisen over MA plans' aggressive sales tactics and misleading coverage claims. Prof. David Meyers at Brown University's School of Public Health analyzed 10 years of MA enrollment data and found that [about 50% of beneficiaries](#) left their contracts by the end of five years with most switching to another MA plan. Switching from MA to traditional Medicare can be problematic. Those who enrolled in traditional Medicare first

before switching to a MA plan are guaranteed to qualify for a Medigap policy without pricing based on their medical history. Medigap insurers can deny coverage to beneficiaries transferring from MA plans or base their prices on medical underwriting in all but four states (CT, MA, ME, NY). Paul Ginsburg, MedPAC's former vice-commissioner, said the inability of enrollees to easily switch between MA and traditional Medicare during open enrollment periods is "a real concern in our system; it shouldn't be that way."



[Has Medicare Advantage lost its luster?](#), by Rylee Wilson, Becker's Hospital Review, 1/25/24

TMR Topline – From 2019 to 2022, MA earnings shrunk by 2.1% among the insurers Moody's rated despite a 40% growth in premiums and members. Facing higher medical costs and lower reimbursement from CMS, Moody's analysts wrote that the program "seems to be losing some of its luster." Insurers cited pent up demand from the pandemic and the popularity of RSV vaccines as some of the reasons for declining earnings. UnitedHealth and Humana have nearly half the MA market, followed by Aetna at 11% and Blue Cross plans combined at 14%. Cigna is looking to sell its business (599,000 members).



[Healthcare bankruptcies in 2023 hit highest level in 5 years](#), by Caroline Hudson, Modern Healthcare, 1/25/24

TMR Topline – Gibbins Advisors looked at Chapter 11 bankruptcy case filings from 2019 to 2023 and found 79 healthcare companies with more than \$10 million in liabilities filed for bankruptcy protection last year, the highest level in the past five years. Pharmaceutical and senior care companies made up nearly half of the list. Financial pressures in healthcare are [expected to continue this year](#), as companies grapple with high labor and supply costs, increased payer denials, low reimbursement rates, federal scrutiny on mergers and acquisitions and ongoing Medicaid disenrollments.



[Ozempic and Wegovy overdose calls have spiked, experts say — here's what to know about dangerous doses](#), by

Melissa Rudy, Fox News, 1/21/24

TMR Topline – Dr. Kait Brown, clinical managing director of America's Poison Centers, reported that overdoses of [semaglutide products](#) such as Ozempic and Wegovy more than doubled last year stating, "US Poison Centers have documented 3,316 exposures to these products through Dec. 31, 2023, more than twice the number of cases reported in 2022." When these medications are initially prescribed, they are given in a low dose and gradually increased over a four-week period according to bariatric surgeon Dr. Seth Kipnis. "If people jump right to the high dose, they will have more initial negative side effects." He advises anyone who is taking these prescriptions to have a [primary care physician](#) or medical provider for follow-up support. No specific antidote exists for an overdose; it's treated with nausea and pain medications, correction of electrolytes, and giving fluids for dehydration. Another potential effect of semaglutide overdose is inflammation of the pancreas.

TMR's Take: Caveat emptor! Aggressive use for weight loss can lead to [complications](#) including stomach paralysis.



[64K women and girls became pregnant due to rape in states with abortion bans, study](#)

[estimates](#), by Megan Lebowitz, NBC News, 1/24/24

TMR Topline – A new research paper published by [JAMA Internal Medicine](#) estimates that over 64,000 women and girls became pregnant because of rape in states that implemented abortion bans after [Roe v. Wade](#) was overruled. Nearly 520,000 rapes were associated with 64,565 pregnancies across 14 states. Texas led with 45% of the rape-related pregnancies. The researchers used data from the CDC, the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the FBI to develop their estimates. Since the [Dobbs](#) decision, there has been [an increase](#) in patients traveling across state lines to get abortions. During the first half of 2023, the Guttmacher Institute [estimates](#) that nearly 1 in 5 people seeking abortions traveled to other states for abortion care.

TMR's Take: Based on healthcare news from Florida and Texas the [first week](#) of January, your Editor's recent [blog](#) described Governors Abbott and DeSantis as "fundamentally frightening." Texas leading in rape-related pregnancies just reinforces that view.