American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Friday, February 19, 2021

The following information comes from directly from news sources including Bloomberg Government, Kaiser Health News, and other news sources.

Schedules: White House and Congress

WHITE HOUSE

- 8am: Biden receives daily brief
- 9am: Biden participates in G7 virtual meeting
- 11:15am: Biden delivers remarks at the virtual Munich Security Conference
- 11:55pm: Biden departs for Kalamazoo, Michigan; Press Secretary Jen Psaki holds gaggle on Air Force One
- 2:25pm: Biden tours Pfizer manufacturing site in Kalamazoo and meets workers producing Covid-19 vaccine
- 3:10pm: Biden delivers remarks at Pfizer plant
- 5:40pm: Biden returns to the White House
- Vice President Kamala Harris travels to Los Angeles and will remain there through the weekend with no scheduled public events
- 11:45am: White House Covid-19 Response Team holds briefing

CONGRESS

- U.S. Senate convenes for pro forma session at 10:15am; U.S. House plans next meeting on Feb. 22
- 10am: House Appropriations subcommittee holds hearing on the pandemic child-care crisis
- 10:30am: House Oversight and Reform subcommittee holds hearing to review final report from the Afghanistan Study Group
- 11:30am: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi holds press briefing with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus to denounce recent spike in anti-Asian hate crimes and violence

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Murthy, Levin Hearings Set Next Week**: The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has scheduled a hearing on Feb. 25 to consider the nominations of Vivek Murthy, former U.S. Surgeon General under former President Barack Obama, to reprise the job under Biden and Rachel Levine, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Health, to serve as assistant HHS secretary.

- **Stat: Federal Judge Nixes Hospitals’ Attempt To Force HHS 340B Crackdown**: A federal judge ruled Thursday that it’s too early for hospitals to challenge the federal government’s lack of action against drug makers in the 340B drug discount program. The decision is the latest installment in an escalating feud between hospitals and drug makers over substantial drug discounts providers get for treating low-income patients.
- **Bloomberg Government: Triple Paid for Drugs in Medicare Than Medicaid**: Brand name drugs covered by Medicare’s outpatient plans are three times more expensive on average than the same drugs covered by Medicaid, the Congressional Budget Office found in a report published yesterday. The report highlights the massive role discounts play in the payment pipeline. Most entities don’t end up paying the base list price for a drug. What a government, employer or an individual ultimately spends boils down to how much leverage they have to pull in discounts.

- **KHN: Medicare Cuts Payment To 774 Hospitals Over Patient Complications**: The federal government has penalized 774 hospitals for having the highest rates of patient infections or other potentially avoidable medical complications. Those hospitals, which include some of the nation’s marquee medical centers, will lose 1% of their Medicare payments over 12 months. The penalties, based on patients who stayed in the hospitals anytime between mid-2017 and 2019, before the pandemic, are not related to covid-19. They were levied under a program created by the Affordable Care Act that uses the threat of losing Medicare money to motivate hospitals to protect patients from harm.

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden to Invoke Defense Production Act Strategically**: The Biden administration intends to go further than it or the Trump administration has in its use of the Defense Production Act to look beyond filling immediate needs and comprehensively improve the medical supply chain so it can weather future disasters and coronavirus-like pandemics. So far, the Korean War-era law has been used as a vehicle for government contracting, but supply consultants said the federal government hasn’t really looked at how it could be better used to shore up the pharmaceutical supply, ensure a steady production of critical items like masks and gowns, or provide loans to manufacturers.

- **CIDRAP: Analysis Suggests High Efficacy For Single Dose Of Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine**: An analysis by Canadian researchers suggests that a single dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is highly efficacious, according to a letter published yesterday in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). Results from the phase 3 trial of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, published in NEJM on Dec 31, 2020, suggested the efficacy after the first dose of the two-dose vaccine was 52.4%, based on data collected during the first 2 weeks after the first shot to before the second shot. The overall efficacy after two doses was 94.8%.

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Has Hefty Clean Air To-Do List**: Outdated emissions limits, regional underfunding, and the exclusion of long-suffering communities has left more than 150 million Americans still living under unhealthy levels of pollution, and groups are calling on Biden to fill the gaps by prioritizing air quality standards. Trump stripped away dozens of protective clean air and environmental standards during his four years in office, whittling away at agency authority to regulate issues like toxic air pollutants. That kept a status quo of emission limits that experts and scientists said were too low to begin with.

- **NPR: Biden To Give $4 Billion To COVAX, Global COVID-19 Vaccine Effort**: President Biden is set on Friday to announce a total of $4 billion in contributions to COVAX, the vaccine alliance trying to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to 92 low- and middle-income countries, a senior administration official told reporters. Biden will make the announcement during a virtual meeting of G-7 leaders about the pandemic.
CIDRAP: High Mortality Found In Hospitalized COVID-19 Patients With Diabetes:
Updated results from a study of hospitalized COVID-19 patients with diabetes shows 1 in 5 died within 28 days of hospitalization, French researchers reported yesterday in Diabetologia. The updated results from the CORONADO (Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and Diabetes Outcomes) study, which evaluated outcomes in diabetic French patients hospitalized for COVID-19 from Mar 10 through Apr 10, 2020, show that among 2,796 patients, 577 (20.6%; 95% confidence interval [CI], 19.2% to 22.2%) died within 28 days of hospitalization and 1,404 (50.2%; 95% CI, 48.3% to 52.1%) were discharged from the hospital. Results presented in May 2020 showed that 10% of patients who had diabetes and COVID-19 died within 7 days of hospitalization.

Modern Healthcare: Five Chronic Conditions Cost Employers $2.5 Billion Over Two Years, Study Shows: Companies spent $2.5 billion to treat employees' asthma, diabetes, hypertension, mental health and substance abuse and back disorders over the course of two years, according to a new study. UnitedHealthcare reviewed all claims issued by the Health Action Council's 57 nationwide employer members—which are responsible for coverage of 281,000 individuals—to find that more than 60% of workers struggle with at least one of these chronic conditions, making them the top cost drivers in employer healthcare. By studying which populations are most impacted by which diseases, Craig Kurtzweil, vice president of UnitedHealthcare's Center for Advanced Analytics, said he aims to help employers and payers lower their overall health spend by structuring targeted benefits packages to meet the needs of these workers.