American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update – Tuesday, February 23, 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

- 1:15pm: President Biden engages in discussion with essential workers for Black History Month
- 4pm: Biden, VP Harris meet with Prime Minister Trudeau to discuss Covid-19 response, climate change
- 5:45pm: Biden, Trudeau give statements on bilateral meeting
- Noon: Press Sec. Jen Psaki holds press briefing

CONGRESS

- U.S. House convenes at 2pm
  - Votes postponed until 6:30pm
- U.S. Senate convenes at 10:30am
  - 2:15pm: Senate debates, votes on confirmation of Tom Vilsack as Agriculture Secretary, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, if cloture invoked on Thomas-Greenfield earlier in the day.

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **Bloomberg Government: Elimination of Medicaid Rebate Caps Pushed:** A proposal to eliminate Medicaid drug rebate caps has “strong support” among Senate Democrats, Finance Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) has told reporters. The bill, which would give states the ability to clawback funding from price increases of certain drugs, is part of Biden’s Covid-19 aid package slated for a vote in the House this week. Wyden made clear it would remain as it passes the Senate. The pharmaceutical industry opposes this provision, because it would cost drugmakers billions of dollars each year.
  - The proposed change would end Medicaid drug rebate caps, which are currently set at 100% of a drug’s average manufacturer price. Once that limit is reached, drugmakers may raise their prices without increasing the net rebates that must be paid.

- **Politico Pro: Labs Ask White House To Revise Test Coverage Guidelines:** The American Clinical Laboratory Association asked the Biden administration Monday to strengthen insurance coverage requirements for Covid-19 testing and replenish the Health Resources & Services Administration’s uninsured test fund. “Uncertainty about coverage and costs has created unnecessary barriers for many patients to access COVID-19 testing,” ACLA President Julie Khani wrote to White House Covid-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients. “Over the course of this public health crisis, the protections Congress promised to patients
have significantly eroded, exacerbated by the tri-agency guidance issued on June 23, 2020.”

- **Politico Pro: FDA Addresses Pulse Oximeter Risks**: Skin color, nail polish, tobacco use, skin temperature and other factors can affect the accuracy of pulse oximeters used to estimate blood oxygen levels, FDA said in a safety communication issued Friday. Patients and health care providers should not solely rely on pulse oximeter readings when monitoring illnesses like Covid-19 at home, according to William Maisel, the director of FDA’s Office of Product Evaluation and Quality for medical devices. The agency’s safety notice comes after increasing concern about racial disparities in the accuracy of pulse oximeter data, driven in part by increased consumer use of the devices during the pandemic.

- **AP: GOP Working To Block Biden's Health Care Pick; Dems Unfazed**: President Joe Biden’s pick for health secretary faces two days of contentious Senate hearings. Republicans are portraying the Californian as unfit but Democrats are unfazed, accusing the GOP of playing politics despite the pandemic. Xavier Becerra, now attorney general of the nation’s most populous state, will be grilled by two panels. Tuesday, it’s the health committee’s turn, followed Wednesday by the Finance Committee, which will vote on sending Becerra’s nomination to the Senate floor. If confirmed, he’d be the first Latino to head the Department of Health and Human Services, a $1.4 trillion agency with a broad portfolio that includes health insurance programs, drug safety and approvals, advanced medical research and the welfare of children.

- **CIDRAP: Drug Supply Chain Issues Aren't Going Away, Report Says**: In a new American Society of Health-system Pharmacists (ASHP) report, 92% of its "2021 Pharmacy Forecast" panelists say global issues like trade restrictions, pandemics like COVID-19, or climate change will increase the potential for more drug shortages, and almost 90% say a major technology failure or breach could cause widespread disruptions in the delivery of US healthcare supplies. To help mitigate these issues, 90% of panelists also predicted that at least 75% of health systems will develop allocation guidelines. In the report, the ASHP notes a 36.6% increase in ongoing drug shortages from 2017 to 2020, with 276 shortages occurring in 2020.

- **Bloomberg Government: FDA Creates Booster Shot Clearance Path to Fight Virus Variants**: Companies with authorized Covid-19 vaccines can build on their existing applications and clinical trials if they need to create booster shots, the FDA said in guidance yesterday to address virus variants. The guidance means vaccine makers will have fewer regulatory hoops to jump through to develop booster shots, which create an additional level of protection for people against new strains of a virus.

- **Reuters: 'Real-World' UK Data Shows 70% Decline In COVID Infections After First Pfizer Shot**: England’s coronavirus vaccine campaign is significantly reducing cases of COVID-19, with a drop of around 70% in infections among healthcare workers who have had a first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, British health officials said on Monday. Data analysed by Public Health England (PHE) showed the Pfizer provided high levels of protection against infection and symptomatic disease from a single dose, and that hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 will be reduced by more 75% in elderly people who have had a first dose.
CIDRAP: Persistent COVID-19 Symptoms Detailed Months After Recovery: One third of symptomatic COVID-19 patients continued to experience symptoms about 5.6 months after their infection began, according to a research letter published late last week in JAMA Network Open. The researchers noted that their study was purely descriptive because of the small participant number. University of Washington researchers received 117 surveys from COVID-19 patients between August and November 2020. Of these, 11 (6.2%) were asymptomatic, 150 (84.7%) were outpatients with mild symptoms, and 16 (9.0%) needed hospitalization.