

American Nephrology Nurses Association

Daily Capitol Hill Update - Tuesday, March 16, 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

- 1:40pm: President Biden departs the White House for Pa.
- 3:30pm: Biden visits a small business in Chester, Pa. to promote the coronavirus relief package
- VP Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff travel to Denver, CO to promote the coronavirus relief package
- 5:45pm: Biden departs Pa., en route to Wilmington, Del., where he will remain overnight

CONGRESS

- U.S. House convenes at noon
- U.S. Senate convenes at 10am, resumes consideration of Isabel Guzman to be administrator of Small Business Administration
 - Senate to vote on whether to invoke cloture on nomination of Katherine Tai to be U.S. trade representative, final confirmation vote on her nomination could occur as early as today

Congressional, Health Policy, and Political News

- **KHN: ‘Painless’ Glucose Monitors Pushed Despite Little Evidence They Help Most Diabetes Patients:** In the nation’s battle against the diabetes epidemic, the go-to weapon being aggressively promoted to patients is as small as a quarter and worn on the belly or arm. A continuous glucose monitor holds a tiny sensor that’s inserted just under the skin, alleviating the need for patients to prick their fingers every day to check blood sugar. The monitor tracks glucose levels all the time, sends readings to patients’ cellphone and doctor, and alerts patients when readings are headed too high or too low.
- **AP: How Well Do COVID Vaccines Protect After Organ Transplant?:** On Monday, researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported a first attempt to find out. They tested 436 people who had received new organs in recent years and were getting the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. A few weeks after the first dose, 17% of the transplant recipients had developed antibodies against the coronavirus, said Dr. Dorry Segev, a Hopkins transplant surgeon who co-authored the study. Segev acknowledged transplant recipients may fare better after the needed second dose – he’ll also check that – but prior studies show the first shot is enough to kickstart antibody production in just about everybody with a well-functioning immune system.
- **Bloomberg Government: Nursing Home Groups Call for \$15 Billion Annually:** The nursing home industry wants state and federal lawmakers to pony up \$15 billion a year to improve safety, quality, and infection control inside its facilities, which have been ground

zero for the Covid-19 pandemic. Stung by more than 175,000 Covid deaths in U.S. long-term care facilities and facing the possibility of congressional calls to improve staffing, care, and living conditions, the industry got ahead of the curve yesterday, releasing its own reform agenda. But it's unclear whether Congress will be sympathetic to the call for aid after passing a \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package.

- **Bloomberg Government: Biden Pushed to Implement Trump Organ Rule:** The past five HHS chief technology officers are among a diverse group of bipartisan supporters urging the Biden administration to enact a Trump rule designed to improve the nation's organ donation, procurement, and transplant system. Obama-era alumni Todd Park, Bryan Sivak and Susannah Fox, and Trump-era alumni Bruce Greenstein and Ed Simcox said the rule will save 7,000 lives a year and cut \$1 billion per year in Medicare dialysis spending.
- **KHN: Analysis: The Trump Health Care Policies That Deserve To Stick Around:** President Joe Biden's goal of providing health care for more Americans advanced this week with his signing of an economic stimulus package that includes subsidies for health insurance premiums and new incentives for states to expand Medicaid, as well as the potential confirmation of Xavier Becerra as secretary of Health and Human Services. But as the current administration works to reverse the actions of its predecessor, it should recognize that former President Donald Trump introduced policies on medical care and drug price transparency that are worth preserving. Those measures could help struggling patient-consumers while the new administration pushes for the far more ambitious reforms Biden campaigned on, which include a public health insurance option and a system that would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices.
- **The Washington Post: In The Coronavirus Relief Package, A Prescription To Expand Medicaid:** Florida and 11 other states, most of them across the South, are the intended audience for a few paragraphs deep in the 630-page American Relief Plan. The legislation offers a novel and generous financial incentive to states if they agree to open Medicaid to more poor people and some in the working class. The White House has embraced the incentive, designed in Congress. It will pose an early test of Biden's powers of persuasion as he tries to make good on his pledge to close the nation's considerable gaps in insurance and health care — gaps the pandemic has thrown into vivid light.
- **Stat: The Viability Of The U.S. Biosimilar Market Is Thrown Into Question Again:** Despite periodic reports that biosimilars have finally arrived and will save the U.S. health care system billions of dollars, Peter Bach and Mark Trusheim remain unconvinced. So the high-profile skeptics have refreshed their controversial, two-year-old argument for overhauling the approach for making alternative versions of pricey biologic medicines available to the American public.
- **Modern Healthcare: CMS Boosts Reimbursement For Administering COVID-19 Vaccinations:** The Biden administration on Monday increased how much Medicare pays providers to administer COVID-19 vaccinations to encourage them to vaccinate more people, hire additional staff and do more patient outreach and education. CMS boosted the average payment for COVID-19 immunizations from \$28 to \$40 for single-dose vaccines and \$45 to \$80 for two-dose vaccines. But the amount each provider receives varies depending on what type of entity carries out the immunization and where it's located, according to the agency. The changes take effect immediately.

- **NBC News: Biden: U.S. Will Reach 100M Shots Ahead Of Schedule As Millions Of Stimulus Checks Go Out:** President Joe Biden said Monday that the United States will reach his goal of administering 100 million coronavirus vaccination shots ahead of schedule, hitting the milestone as 100 million stimulus checks go out to Americans under his Covid-19 relief package. "It's here, sooner than many ever thought possible," Biden said in remarks at the White House. "Over the next 10 days, we will reach two giant goals: One hundred million shots in people's arms and 100 million checks in people's pockets."
- **Stat: Insulin Makers Win A Round In Minn. Lawsuit Accusing Them Of Racketeering:** In a setback to efforts to control insulin prices, a U.S. court judge tossed key accusations made in a high-profile lawsuit filed by the Minnesota Attorney General accusing three drug makers of price gouging. The lawsuit, which was filed in 2018, alleged that Eli Lilly (LLY), Novo Nordisk (NVO), and Sanofi (SNY) fraudulently set artificially high wholesale prices, but then negotiated lower prices by paying rebates and discounts to pharmacy benefit managers. In turn, pharmacy benefit managers create lists of medicines that receive preferred insurance coverage known as formularies. But the negotiations are confidential.