Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Aug. 3, 2020


Health care workers with adequate PPE still have 3.4 times risk of contracting coronavirus than general public, study suggests

CNN (7/31, Erdman) reported, “Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) when caring for patients with [COVID-19] isn’t enough to completely eliminate the threat from the virus for frontline workers, according to a new study from King’s College London.” The study found that “health care workers with adequate gloves, gowns and face masks still had 3.4 times the risk of contracting the coronavirus compared to the general population...and minority health care workers had an even greater risk of testing positive.” The findings were published in The Lancet Public Health.

President signs executive order to expand telehealth services in rural areas

The AP (8/3, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports that the “administration is taking steps to give telehealth a broader role under Medicare, with an executive order that serves as a call for Congress to make doctor visits via personal technology a permanent fixture of the program.” The recently signed order “will also set in motion an experiment under which hospitals in rural communities could receive a more predictable stream of Medicare payments in exchange for delivering better performance on certain measures of quality.”

The Hill (8/3, Sullivan) reports, “The administration waived certain regulatory barriers to video and phone calls with doctors, known as telehealth, when the coronavirus pandemic struck and many people were stuck at home,” and it is now “looking to make some of those changes permanent, arguing the moves will provide another option for patients to talk to their doctors.”
CDC warns of potential spike in acute flaccid myelitis cases

The Washington Post (8/4, Bernstein) reports the CDC “warned parents and caregivers Tuesday to watch for an uncommon, polio-like condition that mostly strikes children, usually between August and November.” The Washington Post adds, “Acute flaccid myelitis [AFM], which may be caused by any of several viruses, is marked by sudden weakness or paralysis in the limbs.” Since 2014, “prevalence of the syndrome has spiked every two years in even-numbered years, often afflicting children about 5 years old.” Thomas Clark, deputy director of the CDC’s division of viral diseases, “said the coronavirus pandemic may force doctors to evaluate patients by phone or telemedicine but warned they should not delay if they suspect the syndrome.”

USA Today (8/4, Rodriguez) reports the CDC attributes the increase in cases of AFM “to enteroviruses, particularly EV-D68, according to the CDC Vital Signs report released Tuesday.” EV-D68 is “the most common virus identified among patients with AFM.”

Coronavirus testing in U.S. drops even as infections remain high and deaths increase

The AP (8/5, Perrone, Forster, Liu) reports coronavirus testing in the U.S. “is dropping even as infections remain high and the death toll rises by more than 1,000 a day, a worrisome trend that officials attribute largely to Americans getting discouraged over having to wait hours to get a test and days or weeks to find out the results.” An AP analysis “found that the number of tests per day slid 3.6% over the past two weeks to 750,000, with the count falling in 22 states.” Some health officials “are calling for the introduction of a different type of test that would yield results in a matter of minutes and would be cheap and simple enough for millions of Americans to test themselves – but would also be less accurate.”

President signs executive order to encourage drug production in the United States

Bloomberg (8/6, Edney, Stein) reports that the president “signed an executive order that would encourage the production of certain drugs and medical supplies in the U.S. following shortages during the [COVID-19] pandemic.” Bloomberg adds, “The order urges purchasers to buy American-made products and loosens federal drug-safety and environmental regulations that the administration says disadvantage domestic producers, among other measures.”