Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Nov. 15, 2021

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Medicare premiums for physician, outpatient services to increase 15% in 2022, CMS says

Modern Healthcare (11/12, Tepper, Subscription Publication) reported, “Medicare members’ monthly premiums for physician and outpatient services will increase nearly 15% in 2022, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said in a news release Friday.” The CMS “attributed the increases to rising health care prices driven by COVID-19-related care, lawmakers’ moves to lower 2021 premiums during the pandemic and the potential for pricey drugs...to receive coverage.” According to Modern Healthcare, “The standard monthly premium will rise to $170.10 in 2022, up 14.5% from $148.50 this year.”

ACA marketplace 2022 open enrollment sees over 133K new enrollees, CMS reports

HealthPayerIntelligence (11/15, Waddill) reports, “After Affordable Care Act marketplace 2022 open enrollment launched on November 1, 2021, CMS reported that the first week ended with 773,557 plan selections,” and of those, “over 133,200 were new enrollees.” CMS “highlighted that more than 1.2 million Americans were on the submitted applications, including dependents and not just the applicant.” According to the article, “The first week of the 2022 open enrollment season fell slightly below the first week of the 2021 open enrollment season.”
Pfizer requests emergency authorization for five-day COVID-19 drug regimen

The Washington Post (11/16, Johnson) reports Pfizer “requested emergency authorization Tuesday for its five-day antiviral” treatment “regimen, [PF-07321332] Paxlovid, making it the second easy-to-take treatment aimed at keeping newly infected people out of the hospital to go before the Food and Drug Administration.” The “submission came shortly after the company announced that the clinical trial testing the drug regimen had been halted early due to overwhelming evidence that it worked.” When the treatment “was given to people at high risk of severe illness within three days of symptom onset, it reduced the rate of death and hospitalization by 89% compared with people given a placebo.”

The New York Times (11/16, Robbins) reports the drug “could become available within weeks if authorization is granted,” and “is meant to be dispensed by pharmacies and taken at home.”

U.S. overdose deaths topped 100K during COVID-19 pandemic, CDC data show

The New York Times (11/17, Rabin) reports, “Americans died of drug overdoses in record numbers as the pandemic spread across the country, federal researchers” with the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics “reported on Wednesday.” During the 12-month period ending in April, provisional figures indicate that “more than 100,000 Americans died of overdoses, up almost 30% from the 78,000 deaths in the prior year.”

The Washington Post (11/17, A1, Keating, Bernstein) reports that this “is the first time that drug-related deaths have reached six figures in any 12-month period” in U.S. history. Furthermore, “[the] new data shows there are now more overdose deaths from the illegal synthetic opioid fentanyl than there were overdose deaths from all drugs in 2016.”

Reuters (11/17) reports the figure “marks a 28.5% jump from the previous year, with deaths from opioids such as fentanyl, which can be 100 times more potent than morphine, and psychostimulants such as methamphetamine helping drive the increase, provisional data from the health agency showed.”
The Washington Post (11/18, Diamond) reports, “The American Medical Association and more than 60 other health care associations on Thursday called on employers to voluntarily implement President Biden’s contested vaccine-or-testing mandate, saying businesses had no time to waste ahead of the busy holiday season.” The organizations wrote, “We—physicians, nurses and advanced practice clinicians, health experts, and health care professional societies—fully support the requirement that workers at companies with over 100 workers be vaccinated or tested. ... From the first day of this pandemic, businesses have wanted to vanquish this virus. Now is their chance to step up and show they are serious.”