

Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of March 14, 2022

Read *AMA Morning Rounds*®' most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of March 14, 2022–March 18, 2022.

Annual overdose deaths in the U.S. surge to unprecedented levels

CNN (3/16, McPhillips) reports, “Annual drug overdose deaths have reached another record high in the United States as deaths from fentanyl and other synthetic opioids surge to unprecedented levels,” investigators concluded. In fact, “an estimated 105,752 people died of drug overdoses in the 12-month period ending October 2021, according to provisional data published” March 16 by the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics.

Editor’s Note: Ending the nation’s drug-related overdose and death epidemic requires continued physician leadership. Get resources from the AMA.

Pfizer, BioNTech file for emergency authorization of second COVID booster for people 65 and older

The Washington Post (3/15, A1, McGinley, Pager, Johnson) reports “Pfizer and its partner, BioNTech, filed Tuesday for emergency authorization of a second booster shot of their coronavirus vaccine for people 65 and older, an effort to bolster waning immunity that occurs several months after the first booster, the companies announced.” The companies’ submission to the FDA “includes ‘real world data’ collected in Israel, one of the few countries that has authorized a second booster for older people.” The FDA’s decision “could come relatively quickly, especially if officials conclude the data is straightforward and does not have to be reviewed by a panel of outside vaccine experts.”

Health care staffing shortages, workers' mental health top patient safety concerns, report finds

Modern Healthcare (3/14, Gillespie, Subscription Publication) reports, "Staff shortages and workers' mental health are top patient safety concerns that health system executives must tackle, according to ECRI's annual Top Ten Patient Safety Concerns for 2022." Other concerns listed in the report "are eliminating bias and racism in addressing patient safety, vaccine coverage gaps, diagnostic error, nonventilator health care-associated pneumonia, making telehealth patient-friendly, supply chain disruptions, emergency use authorized products and telemetry monitoring."

Medscape (3/14, Terry, Subscription Publication) reports ECRI "notes that a high proportion of nurses are at or near traditional retirement age," yet "nursing schools are unlikely to be able to supply enough nurses to replace those retiring." Also, physicians are "in short supply, and the situation is expected to grow worse, the report says."

U.S. rolling back COVID-19 precautions in move toward normalcy

The New York Times (3/12, Healy, Wong) reported, "It was two years ago that the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and after nearly one million deaths across the United States, the virus is far from gone." However, "after signs of progress and exhaustion, even cities and states with the strictest coronavirus precautions have been rolling them back." For the "millions of Americans who kept their masks on and socially distanced long after much of the country abandoned safety measures, it is a moment that has stirred relief, but also disappointment, frustration and queasy ambivalence."

The AP (3/11, Flaccus, Weber, Tang) reported, "The world is finally emerging from a brutal stretch of winter dominated by the highly contagious Omicron variant, bringing a sense of relief on the two-year anniversary of the start of the pandemic." Still, "health experts are also urging some caution."

Administration taps medical professionals in new advertising push urging parents to vaccinate children against COVID-19

CBS News (3/17, Tin) reports, “The heads of some of America’s largest professional health care associations are urging parents to get their children vaccinated against COVID-19, as part of a new advertising push by the Biden administration to persuade millions of families that have yet to do so.” These new “ads—a pair of 60-second spots titled ‘Oath’ and ‘Trust’—feature pleas from” medical professionals including AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, M.D. Both of the “spots are slated to run on social media as soon as Thursday, as well as on television screens starting next week.”

The Hill (3/17, Choi) reports that in the “videos, the health care leaders tapped by HHS stressed that the vaccine is safe, while contracting COVID-19 is not.”

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