Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of April 4, 2022

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of April 4, 2022–April 8, 2022.

Medicare will officially limit aducanumab coverage to patients in clinical trials, CMS announces

The New York Times (4/7, A1, Belluck) reports that on Thursday, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that Medicare will officially cover Biogen’s Alzheimer’s drug aducanumab (Aduhelm) “only for people who receive it as participants in a clinical trial.” CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure “said the decision was intended to protect patients while gathering data to indicate whether Aduhelm...could actually help them by slowing the pace of their cognitive decline.”

Bloomberg (4/7, Tozzi, Langreth) reports that, however, CMS officials “said that the policy would provide broader coverage to future drugs that show a clear benefit in large trials and get full approval from the Food and Drug Administration.”

FDA advisers struggle with timeline for new COVID-19 vaccines, future booster strategy

The New York Times (4/6, LaFraniere) reports that during the “meeting of an expert advisory committee to the Food and Drug Administration,” HHS’ Division of Influenza and Emerging Infectious Diseases director Robert Johnson, PhD “outlined a tight time frame on Wednesday if the Biden administration hopes to have new coronavirus vaccines by the fall.” Similarly, FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research director Dr. Peter Marks “said the time frame was tightly compressed, with a possible decision needed by May or June.” The panel “grappled with what the U.S. coronavirus vaccine strategy should be for the rest of the year, amid growing evidence that new
variants have eroded some of the existing vaccines' power.”

NBC News (4/6, Lovelace) reports the panel was ultimately “unable to come up with a plan, saying there were a significant number of unknowns.”

Report: Preventable deaths of reproductive-age women higher in U.S. than other high-income countries

MedPage Today (4/5, D’Ambrosio) reports, “Reproductive-age women in the U.S. had the highest rate of preventable deaths compared with 10 other high-income countries, according to a report from the Commonwealth Fund.” Also, “the overall maternal mortality rate in the U.S. was 23.8 per 100,000—more than three times the rate for all other countries included in the report.”

Average BMI, obesity higher among U.S. adults during pandemic, study suggests

HealthDay (4/4) reports “significantly higher average body mass index (BMI) and obesity prevalence rates were seen among U.S. adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a study.” The findings published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine also revealed that “there were significantly higher rates for any exercise participation (+4.4%), average sleep hours in a 24-hour period (+1.5%), and average alcoholic drink days in the past month (+2.7%); lower rates were seen for smoking at least some days (?4%).”

COVID-19 hospitalizations drop to lowest levels since summer 2020

The AP (4/1, Kruesi, Finley) reported “COVID-19 hospitalization numbers have plunged to their lowest levels since” the summer of 2020. The AP added, “The number of patients hospitalized with the coronavirus has fallen more than 90% in more than two months, and some hospitals are going days without a single COVID-19 patient in the ICU for the first time since early 2020.” Physicians “hope to see a correction to the slide in pediatric visits, yearly checkups and cancer screenings.”

CNN (4/1, McPhillips) reported that as of Friday, there were “16,138 people in the hospital with COVID-19—fewer than there have ever been since the U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services first started tracking in July 2020.”

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