

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE  
COALITION

**From the Editor:** This issue's article summaries include Covid updates, recent FDA actions, the chilling effects of a nurse's conviction for criminally negligent homicide and the need for Medicare Advantage reforms. To access the full article, just click on the headline.



[‘Forgotten’ Parents of Kids Under 5 Push FDA to Clear Moderna Shot](#), by Robert Langreth and Fiona Rutherford, Bloomberg, 3/23/22

**TMR Topline** – Dr. Alissa Khan, pediatric oncologist at

St. Joseph's Children's Hospital, Paterson, NJ said the omicron variant was a disaster for children under 5. *“Our public health establishment failed to prioritize young children,”* said Kahn, part of a group, [Protect Their Future](#), that wants the FDA to move fast on an EUA for Moderna's vaccine for kids ages 6 months to 5 years old. In a study of 6,700 children, Moderna's efficacy ranged from 38-44% in preventing symptomatic infection. While that's less than the 50% goal in the FDA's original guidance, Dr. Anthony Fauci noted *“in the era of omicron this is actually quite comparable to the efficacy against infection in what we're seeing now with other vaccines.”*



[US FDA approves second Covid booster for Americans 50 and older](#), by Zoe Williams, The Guardian, 3/29/22

**TMR Topline** – The FDA has authorized second Covid-19 booster doses of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines for older

(over 50) and immunocompromised Americans at least four months after the first booster dose. It would apply to immunocompromised persons over 12 (Pfizer) or 18 (Moderna).



[A new federal website aims to solve a key Covid problem: where to get antiviral pills](#), by Tamara Keith, NPR, 3/30/22

**TMR Topline** – The White House launched [COVID.gov](#), a website meant to be a one-stop shop for everything from free high-quality masks to antiviral pills. Aimed at facilitating test-to-treat, it has a new locator tool, making it easier to find the more than 2,000 locations where people can get tested for Covid-19 and, if a prescriber says they need it, immediately get antiviral pills. The site also offers testing and vaccine/booster locators, a form to order free at-home Covid tests, a CDC community risk level lookup and information on where to get free high-quality masks.

**TMR's Take** – The vaccine vs. variants race to recovery continues apace with vaccines now available for all age groups once the FDA issues an EUA for those under 5.



[ALS drug fails to win key recommendation from FDA panel](#), by Berkeley Lovelace, Jr., NBC News, 3/30/22

**TMR Topline** – By a 4-6 vote, an FDA advisory panel declined to endorse an [experimental drug for patients with](#)

[ALS](#) manufactured by Amylyx Pharmaceuticals. ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a fatal disease with no cure. A single Phase 2 clinical trial of 137 patients did not show strong-enough evidence that the drug is effective in slowing the disease's progression. *“It's a terrible disease. Just like Alzheimer's, there is no cure for these disorders, and they affect not only patients but the whole family,”* said committee member Dr. Liana Apostolova, a neurologist at Indiana University.

**TMR's Take** – The [Ice Bucket Challenge](#) raised more than \$200 million worldwide for ALS research that is helping fund the search for a cure. The advisory committee's decision, while disappointing, should help restore the FDA's credibility after its botched handling of the [Aduhelm](#) approval last year.



[Nurse's conviction should be wake-up call for health system leaders, IHI says](#), by

Mackenzie Bean, Becker's Hospital Review, 3/31/22

**TMR Topline** - RaDonda Vaught's [conviction](#) of criminally negligent homicide for a fatal medication error in 2017 at Vanderbilt University Medical center damages patient safety and should serve as a wake-up call for health system leaders to improve harm prevention efforts, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement [said](#). *"We know ...that most medical errors result from flawed systems, not reckless practitioners,"* IHI said, noting *"that systems can learn from errors and improve, but only when those systems encourage reporting, transparently acknowledge their mistakes and are held accountable for those errors."* Ms. Vaught inadvertently injected a 75-year-old patient with a powerful paralyzer, vecuronium, when she was prescribed a sedative, Versed, and took responsibility for the error from the outset.

**TMR's Take** – The verdict is having a chilling effect among nursing leaders and has the potential to derail over 20 years of progress in quality and patient safety. The IHI knows whereof it speaks. Its founder, [Dr. Donald Berwick](#), known as *"the conscience of healthcare,"* was inducted into the Healthcare Hall of Fame last month.

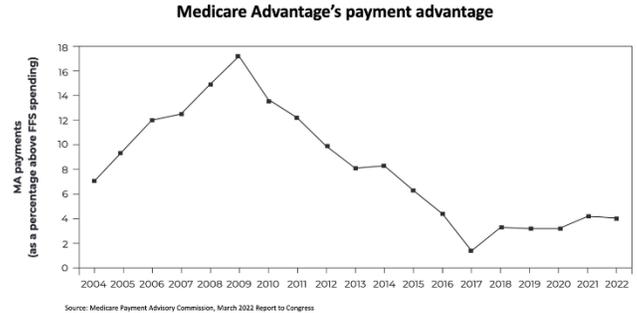


[Medicare's Disadvantage](#), by Merrill Goozner, GoozNews, 3/25/22

**TMR Topline** – Using language rarely seen in a

[Medicare Payment Advisory Commission \(MedPAC\) report](#), it told Congress and the CMS that *"a major overhaul of MA policies is urgently needed."* Payments to Medicare Advantage (MA) plans average 4% more than fee-for-service Medicare. With 27 million seniors now in these higher cost plans, continued growth *"will further worsen Medicare's fiscal sustainability."* About 62 million seniors and people with disabilities depend on the program for their health care coverage. When launched in 1997, the MA program was touted as a way for the

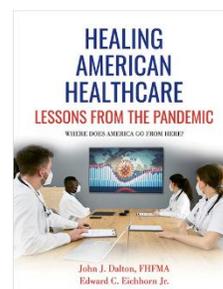
government to save money. Private insurers selling MA



plans in any given county or region receive a capitated payment for every senior they enroll that is based on the average spending for a traditional fee-for-service (FFS) Medicare beneficiary in that region. Insurers then use data mining to pore over patient medical records to find untreated diagnoses, which the plans then use to inflate their capitated payments. This "upcoding" resulted in an estimated \$20 billion in over-payments in 2020. A [Wall Street Journal investigation](#) in 2018 found that insurers were combining plans with poor performance into larger, better-performing plans in order to win payment bonuses for the entire group. There have been dozens of whistleblower lawsuits filed in federal courts alleging upcoding, but MA's biggest players have largely eluded successful prosecution, often with the help of insurer-friendly federal judges.

The insurance industry has successfully used its clout in Congress and at CMS to push back against any new law or regulatory action that would bring MA reimbursement in line with FFS reimbursement. MA plans aggressively market their added dental, vision and prescription drug coverage at no additional premium. Rather than delivering lower cost care, their profits result from narrowing networks and using traditional tools like prior authorization to discourage utilization regardless of its impact on outcomes.

**TMR's Take** – Modern Healthcare's Editor Emeritus is a keen observer and commentator worth listening to.



"Healing American Healthcare: Lessons from the Pandemic" was published March 21 in both softcover and eBook versions. Click [here](#) for a special introductory offer that expires April 21.