



## March 21, 2016 E-Newsletter

### WEP Gets a Congressional Hearing, AT LAST!

Ask your Congressman to please send someone to the Ways and Means Committee Meeting NEXT TUESDAY, March 22, at 10:00 AM EDT in Room B-318 Rayburn House Building to find out about H.R. 711.

Social Security Fairness

Kevin Brady (R-TX) has said for many years that, although the idea of the WEP is correct, the formula for it is not, and he has been trying to find a way to change the formula. Last year he introduced H.R. 711 which relies on the increased employment data that Social Security now has to better enforce the offsets (collect money from people who might have been missed) and to lower the financial penalty for the majority of retirees. The result would be a change in the penalty with no expected extra cost to the S. S. budget.

Since Rep. Brady is now Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives, he can move things along. Next Tuesday they will be holding a hearing on his bill, H.R. 711, which replaces the Windfall Elimination Provision and is projected to cut the amount of the penalty for public workers not yet retired by 50% and for people already retired by about 30%. Although most of our Representatives do not belong to the Ways and Means Committee, they can **send an aide to follow the proceedings and hopefully gain a better understanding of our issue....**[Read What you can do to help here.](#)

**Sign the Petition: Repeal the Government Pension Offset and the Windfall Provision Act!**

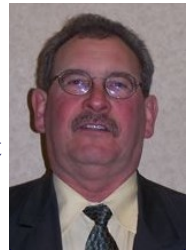
### Roger Boudreau Nominated for ARA Northeast Regional, Sub Region One Director

Lauren Lucchi, Organization and Field Services of the American Federation of Teachers, and Manager of the AFT Retirees Division, has submitted the name of Roger Boudreau in nomination for the upcoming election for the Northeast Regional, Sub Region One Director position.

Roger is a Rhode Island Alliance for Retired Americans Vice-President and has been since it became chartered by the ARA, President of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Federation of Teachers Retirees for the past eight years, American Federation of Teachers National Standing Committee for Retirees for the past eight years, and also is a representative of public employee retirees on the state pension board and is entering his third four-year term.

As President, of the RI AFT Retirees, Roger is a well-known and respected advocate and has gained an appreciation for the broad network of retirees which the Alliance represents. As Vice-president of the RI ARA chapter, he had the privilege of representing them at the ARA Legislative Conference in July 2015. His attendance brought him into contact with other New England Regional activists whom he looks forward to working with in the future, should he be fortunate enough to be elected to open position.

We would appreciate any assistance you can provide with respect to outreach and contact with Northeast Regional, Sub Region One leaders as he seeks support in his election bid. Thank you in advance for your support.



Roger Boudreau

### Are You Registered to Vote?



The deadline to register to vote in the Rhode Island presidential primary is coming up, **March 27, 2016.**

If you wish to register to vote in Rhode Island you must submit a Rhode Island Voter Registration Form.

**[Click here to Register in Rhode Island](#)**

You can complete the form, print it, sign it and send it to your local **Board of Canvassers** for processing.

**This election is to important to our family, members and friends to not register and vote.**

**[Link to other states voter registration process](#)**

### CLICK BELOW FOR MORE INFORMATION

**TPP FACES HUGE OPPOSITION FROM ENVIRONMENTAL, LABOR, FAITH AND OTHER GROUPS-AND FROM MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS. TAKE ACTION TODAY TO TELL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE: #STOPTPP!**



## Medicare seeks new way to buy Part B drugs, support physicians

### Rule to address access, affordability, and innovation in prescription drugs

Medicare Part B paid \$20 billion on outpatient drugs last year. Maybe there is a better way to pay for prescription drugs? The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has proposed a rule to test new models that will also offer more support to physicians and other clinicians in delivering high quality care.

In 2015, Medicare Part B spent \$20 billion on outpatient drugs administered by physicians and hospital outpatient departments. Total prescription drug spending in the U.S. was about \$457 billion in 2015, or 16.7 percent of overall health spending, according to a report released yesterday.

CMS wants public input and comments as part of the rulemaking process, and says, in a news release, it looks forward to continuing to work with stakeholders through the rulemaking process to maximize the value and learning from the proposed tests.

Medicare Part B covers prescription drugs that are administered in a physician's office or hospital outpatient department, such as cancer medications, injectables like antibiotics, or eye care treatments.

The proposed Medicare Part B Model would test new ways to support physicians and other clinicians as they choose the drug that is right for their patients...[Read More](#)



## Medicare data on skilled nursing facility use and payments released

### Comprehensive resource for information on skilled nursing facility costs and services

Medicare data providing detailed information on services provided to Medicare beneficiaries by skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), including \$27 billion in payments for 2013, was released today by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Included is information on utilization, payments, and submitted charges organized by provider, state, and resource utilization group (RUG). The file is known as the Skilled Nursing Facility Utilization and Payment Public Use File (SNF PUF).

The data include information

- ◆ on 15,055 skilled nursing facilities,
- ◆ over 2.5 million stays, and
- ◆ almost \$27 billion in Medicare payments for 2013.

The data set does not contain any individually identifiable information about Medicare beneficiaries.

“The Skilled Nursing Facility data released today is yet another example of our commitment to greater data transparency,” said CMS Chief Data Officer Niall Brennan.

“CMS believes that when information flows more freely, the health care system functions more efficiently. This leads to better care, smarter spending, and healthier people.”

In addition to information on payments and charges, the SNF PUF contains information on two categories of RUGs for patients who receive a significant amount of therapy: Ultra-High (RU) and Very High (RV) Rehabilitation RUGs.

Consistent with prior CMS findings, the SNF PUF shows that for these two RUGs, the amount of therapy provided is often very close to the minimum amount of minutes needed to qualify a patient for these categories.

Medicare SNF per diem payment amounts for rehabilitation RUGs are primarily based on therapy minutes and payment amounts for these two RUGs can exceed payments for comparable RUGs with fewer therapy minutes by more than 25 percent.

“CMS strives to ensure that patient need, rather than payment system incentives, are driving the provision of therapy services,” says Dr. Shantanu Agrawal, Deputy Administrator for Program Integrity and Director of the Center for Program Integrity.

“These concerns have prompted us to refer this issue to the Recovery Auditor Contractors (RAC) for further investigation, and our hope is that data transparency will facilitate real changes.”

The SNF PUF was created from CMS administrative claims data for Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in the fee-for-service program available from the CMS Chronic Condition Data Warehouse

The data cover calendar year 2013 and is based on SNF Part A institutional claims.

**View fact sheet on the [Skilled Nursing Facility data set](#)**



## Senator demands stop to abuse of nursing home residents on social media

**ProPublica reported in December about inappropriate posts by employees of nursing homes and assisted living centers**



A U.S. senator has asked government regulators what, if anything, they're doing to stop nursing home workers from taking degrading and dehumanizing photos of residents and posting them on social media.

In a letter sent Tuesday, March 8, to the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., referenced a ProPublica story from last year that identified about three dozen inappropriate posts by employees of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Some included naked photos and videos of residents, many of whom have dementia.

"This type of abuse is unacceptable and falls short of our moral obligation to the 'least of these' in our society," Carper, ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said in a statement. "We all want our loved ones to receive the quality of care and attention they deserve from the professionals to whom we entrust their care."

The Office for Civil Rights is the agency that enforces the federal patient privacy law known as HIPAA. It can impose both civil and criminal penalties for violations, but it rarely does so, we reported last year.

Carper asked the office how many complaints it has received related to social media use in nursing homes. He asked how many have resulted in civil penalties or a referral to the Department of Justice. And he wanted to know if the office planned to issue guidance to nursing homes on the use of social media and HIPAA, more formally the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

Deven McGraw, the office's deputy director for health information privacy, said in an email Tuesday that the office would reply to the senator's letter but that "there is nothing I can release to you at this point."...[Read More](#)

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## Doctors Ponder Delicate Talks As Medicare Pays For End-Of-Life Counsel

*By Phil Galewitz*

JUPITER, Florida — She didn't want to spend the rest of her days seeing doctors, the 91-year-old woman confessed to Dr. Kevin Newfield as he treated a deep wound on her arm.

"You don't have to, but you have to tell me what you do want," Newfield replied.

"I'm not afraid of dying. I'm afraid of being 106," she told the surgeon and her daughter, who was in the room with them.

The woman's spontaneous admission in Newfield's south Florida office that January day triggered a 20-minute discussion about living wills, hospice and other end-of-life issues, Newfield said.



An orthopedic surgeon who sometimes performs amputations, Newfield is comfortable having those conversations.

Many doctors are not, but a Medicare policy, known as advance care planning, that took effect in January could help change that.

Physicians can now bill Medicare \$86 for an office-based, end-of-life counseling session with a patient for as long as 30 minutes. Medicare has set no rules on what doctors must discuss during those sessions. Patients can seek guidance on completing advance directives stating if or when they want life support measures such as ventilators and feeding tubes, and how to appoint a family member or friend to make medical decisions on their behalf if they cannot, for instance.

The new policy reflects Americans' growing interest in planning the last stage of their lives when they may be unable to make their wishes known.

In 2014, the Institute of Medicine, an influential panel of experts, found that the nation's health system was not adequately dealing with end-of-life care, and among its recommendations was that insurers pay providers for advance care planning discussions....[Read More](#)

## Smartphone diabetes apps regularly share your personal info

### Study in JAMA finds few have privacy policies



In the transmission analysis that included 65 smartphone apps, sensitive health information from diabetes apps (e.g., insulin and blood glucose levels) was routinely collected and shared with third parties, according to a new study.

The researchers found 86 percent of apps placing tracking cookies and 76 percent without privacy policies. Of the 19 apps with privacy policies that shared data with third parties, 11 apps disclosed this fact, whereas 8 apps did not.

In a study published in the March 8 issue of *JAMA*, Sarah R. Blenner, J.D., M.P.H., of the Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago-Kent College of Law, Chicago, and colleagues examined the privacy policies of Android diabetes apps and the sharing of health information.

One-fifth of smartphone owners had health apps in 2012. Health apps can transmit sensitive medical data, including disease status and medication compliance.

The researchers found that privacy risks and the relationship between privacy disclosures and practices of health apps had not been well studied before. ...[Read More](#)

## Starving eye cells contribute to blindness in senior citizens

### Unable to produce energy, photoreceptors trigger age-related macular degeneration

If there was a list of diseases and afflictions senior citizens most want to avoid it would probably start with Alzheimer's disease and pancreatic cancer, but right up there near the top would also be age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness amount senior citizens. New findings released today debunk the scientific beliefs surrounding the cause of abnormal proliferation of blood vessels leading to blindness, and claim to open new therapeutic avenues for retinal diseases such as AMD.



Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of visual impairment in people over 50 in developed countries. Although this condition affects up to 20% of people between the ages of 65 and 75, what drives abnormal blood vessels to invade the retina is unknown.

Researchers from Montreal and Boston now provide a new mechanism for that blinding retinal disease in a study just published in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature Medicine*.

"In a murine model of AMD, we found that the inability of photoreceptors - nerve cells that capture light and generate vision - to produce energy may drive abnormal blood vessels to invade the retina" said Jean-Sébastien Joyal, an intensive care pediatrician at mother-child research hospital CHU Sainte-Justine and professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Montreal.

"We also discovered that photoreceptors do not rely exclusively on glucose to produce energy as previously thought, but also use lipids as a fuel substrate (like the heart, for example)" he said. ...[Read More](#)

The New England ARA state affiliates are actively pursuing these Petitions.

**Petition Subject: Observation Status: "Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program"**

ADD  
YOUR  
NAME

**Get The Message Out:  
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

**Petition Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 37 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.**

ADD  
YOUR  
NAME

**Get The Message Out:  
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

**Petition Subject: Elimination of the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act to make sure the Congress of the United States enacts legislation, HR.973 & S.1651**

ADD  
YOUR  
NAME

**Get The Message Out:  
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**