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Wilhelmi: Illinois Hospital Staffing Shortages Remain a Point of Pain

As part of Crain's Chicago Business [Forum on physician retention](#), IHA President and CEO A.J. Wilhelmi offered his perspective on why addressing workforce challenges remain a critical priority to quality care. Wilhelmi's letter, "Illinois hospital staffing shortages remain a point of pain," published Jan. 29, underscored the significant challenges that staff shortages present to the delivery of healthcare, while highlighting the innovating approaches hospitals and health systems are taking to attract and retain healthcare workers.

Including "increased wages, signing and retention bonuses, new procedures to protect healthcare workers from violence and implementing new models of care," Wilhelmi writes "Illinois hospitals are taking steps to build a robust worker pipeline for the future, partnering with colleges and universities to offer scholarships, tuition discounts, loan forgiveness and continuing education credit. Mentorship opportunities are also offered to middle and high school students to educate them early about the various healthcare professions."

However, he says, "the workforce shortages is real" and will remain a "pressure point for hospitals and health systems for the foreseeable future." In response, Wilhelmi emphasized, "It is critical that the healthcare community and our government partners work together to identify short-term and long-term solutions to build our workforce and ensure access to care will not be jeopardized."

Wilhelmi pointed to participation in the Nursing Licensure Compact and addressing Illinois' outlier status as a high-cost medical liability insurance state as limitations to our ability to attract and retain clinicians. In his letter, he advocated for "opening the pipeline by creating more opportunities to attract more people into the healthcare profession, passing legislation to better protect healthcare workers from violence, and joining the national nurse compact to open up the pool of workers for Illinois healthcare organizations."

"Addressing these workforce challenges is critical, so that Illinois hospitals can do what they do best — provide quality, compassionate care to patients across the state," Wilhelmi concluded.

[Click here](#) to read the entire commentary letter.

HHS Issues Guidance on Patient Visitation Rights

The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights (OCR) recently issued [guidance](#) related to certain nondiscrimination regulations related to patient visitation at hospitals and other healthcare facilities. The guidance underscores that regulations prohibit discrimination in visitation based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability. The OCR noted it received numerous complaints and inquiries related to visitation rights during the pandemic. In response, the OCR provided clarification on 15 frequently asked questions about patient visitation rights to ensure patients, residents, families and caregivers are aware of their rights regarding patient visitation, and to ensure healthcare entities participating in Medicare and Medicaid are aware of their obligations. As a reminder, Illinois has its own visitation

requirements, but hospitals must also comply with these federal requirements.

FREE OUD Treatment Fellowship ECHO® Program Cohort 10

Rush University Medical Center is now accepting applications for the tenth cohort of the Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) Treatment Fellowship ECHO® Program for Illinois primary care providers. The purpose of this fellowship program is to train Illinois primary care providers, including physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, in the assessment and treatment of OUDs. The goal of the seven-month program is to increase access to OUD treatment services in areas of Illinois that currently have limited or no access to medications for addiction treatment. Therefore, providers from these areas will receive priority for admission. The free training will provide clinical guidance and technical support around clinical workflows, policies, and protocols to ensure compliance with clinical standards, and will provide training in evidence-based practice. The seven-month program will launch on April 20; applications are due April 5. *Click here* for registration information, eligibility requirements, and program details and deadlines.

FDA Safety Alert, Recalls

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a safety alert to healthcare providers about AirFit and AirTouch mask models recalled by ResMed Ltd. These masks are used with bilevel positive airway pressure (also known as Bilevel PAP, BiPAP or BPAP) machines and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). The recalled masks have magnets that can cause potential injuries or death when the magnets interfere with certain implanted metallic medical devices or metallic objects in the body. The FDA classified this recall as a Class I recall, the most serious type of recall.

The FDA also flagged possible health risks associated with the Equinox Shoulder System joint replacement devices. These devices were packaged in defective bags that were missing one of the oxygen barrier layers that protect the devices from oxidation. This can lead to faster device wear or failure, and device component cracking or fracture. As a result, people with the device may need additional surgery to replace or correct the implanted Equinox Shoulder System. The FDA recommends that healthcare providers not implant any Equinox Shoulder Systems packaged in defective bags, and monitor patients with the implanted devices for potential device wear, failure or bone loss.

Aligned Medical Solution has also initiated a nationwide recall of Nurse Assist Sterile Saline because the product cannot be verified as having the required sterility assurance level (SAL) of 10⁻⁶. In populations most at risk, such as patients who are immunocompromised, there is a possibility that the use of the affected product could potentially result in severe or life-threatening adverse events, though no injuries have been reported to date.

COVID-19 Information

The Illinois Dept. of Public Health (IDPH) has launched a weekly Infectious Respiratory Disease Surveillance Dashboard that will be updated weekly on Friday. This report provides the public with the latest data on hospital visits, seasonal trends, lab test positivity and demographic data.

Click here to visit the IDPH COVID-19 resources webpage. IDPH will continue to report the weekly number of people with COVID-19 admitted to hospitals from emergency departments, deaths and vaccinations, with COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus information also reported through the dashboard of the Illinois Wastewater Surveillance System.

Briefly Noted

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has posted information for healthcare providers submitting claims for drugs and biologicals separately payable under Medicare Part B that have unused and discarded amounts from single-dose containers or single-use packages. The information includes FAQs and Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System codes.



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