The nation’s cancer experts say it is possible to eliminate more than one in five cancer deaths in the U.S. even if researchers never invent another test or treatment. For this plan to work, every single American would have to take full advantage of the best medical care the country has to offer, reports NPR. If they were to do so, the country’s cancer mortality rate would fall by 22 percent, according to researchers from the American Cancer Society.

Dr. Otis Brawley, chief medical and scientific officer of the organization, says many cancer deaths could be averted if these demographic gaps were narrowed. He discussed the future of cancer prevention, screening and treatment, as the American Cancer Society lays out its vision for cancer control in a series of articles that are being published in CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians starting Tuesday.

There’s evidence that it’s already happening, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, which improved Americans’ access to health care in states that opted to expand their Medicaid programs.

As a result, cases of breast, lung, colorectal and pancreatic cancer, as well as melanomas, have been diagnosed earlier in these states, according to a previous study.
As physicians know, earlier diagnosis typically leads to earlier treatment and better outcomes, including a reduced risk of death.

### U.S. Opposition to Breast-Feeding Resolution Stuns World Health Officials

The New York Times reported this week that the United States delegation attending a United Nations-affiliated World Health Assembly stumped public health officials and foreign diplomats with their opposition to a breast feeding resolution.

The resolution, saying that mother’s milk is healthiest for children and that countries should strive to limit misleading marketing of breast milk substitutes, was expected to be approved quickly and easily by the hundreds of attendees.

But then, says the Times, the United States delegation, embracing the interests of infant formula manufacturers, upended the deliberations, seeking to water down the resolution by removing language that called on governments to “protect, promote and support breast-feeding” and another passage that called on policymakers to restrict the promotion of food products that many experts say can have deleterious effects on young children.

That goes against decades of advice by most medical organizations and public health experts.

In addition, several countries said they were threatened with U.S. aid being withheld if they introduced the legislation (which ultimately was introduced by Russia). During the deliberations, some American delegates even suggested the United States might cut its contribution to the W.H.O., several negotiators said.

President Trump denounced the Times article on Monday, tweeting that his administration opposed the resolution because it called for limits on the promotion of infant formula, not because of objections to breastfeeding. The Federalist notes that many of the Times’ articles sources were unnamed.

### HHS Uses DNA Testing to Reunite Migrant Families

Officials told reporters last week that DNA tests are being used to confirm that children are being returned to people who claim to be their parents, reports The Hill.

The Department of Health and Human Services said that the agency is using the "faster" and more accurate method in order to comply with a court order to reunite children aged 4 and under with families this week, and children aged 5 to 17 by July 26. But yesterday, the Trump administration said only 38 of 102 children younger than 5 had been reunited with their parents by the deadline set by a federal judge.

Under normal circumstances, HHS would verify relationships using birth certificates or other documentation and use DNA testing as a backup.

Advocates for migrant children and their families worry about the government storing the DNA and using it for other purposes. However, one official said the information will be used "solely" to reunite families, and for no other purpose.

And how did HHS Secretary Alex Azar end up being the face of the migrant crisis? Politico takes a look at how he got stuck with the job that nobody wanted.

### Medicaid Expansion Challenge Raises Questions For Virginia
Virginia’s plan to expand health-care coverage for more of its poorest residents — requiring some to work for benefits — is still on track despite a similar plan being blocked in Kentucky by a federal judge.

But could the situation in Kentucky mean a future legal challenge of Virginia’s Medicaid work requirements?

Officials say it’s early to tell and that they will stay the course as they prepare to expand Medicaid and deliver subsidized health care to low-income residents, reports the Daily Press.

Virginia’s Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) is still developing a plan — formally known as a waiver — to send to the federal government for approval. This is required because the state wants to modify traditional Medicaid with work requirements, just like Kentucky and a number of other states.

“We remain focused on the work necessary to ensure that new health coverage for Virginia adults is available beginning on January 1, 2019,” said Dr. Jennifer Lee, director of DMAS, in a statement. “Developing a waiver is a separate and ongoing process, as described in the final state budget. Virginia officials will continue our dialogue with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services related to the expanded coverage as well as the waiver. Virginians are counting on us to ensure a smooth process for enrollment of approximately 400,000 adults, and that effort remains our top priority.”

Is Job Security in Medicine a Myth?

There may be a demand for physicians, but it doesn’t mean your job is secure, says this startling blog from Kevin MD.

As we hear of other industries in upheaval, some entire industries collapsing, and huge industrial stalwarts having financial issues (GE was just taken off the S&P 500), and with job security at an all-time low in many ways ... are we immune to it all?

The author continues by noting how non-physicians (or even other physicians) or technology could replace us in our current roles. And everything from medical licensure, hospital administration and the economy could affect physicians’ financial well-being.

Trump Taps Kavanaugh for Supreme Court

Legislators (and the media) are gearing up for a messy fight to confirm President Trump’s pick to replace retiring Supreme Court justice Anthony Kennedy.

On Monday, in a prime-time television announcement, the president announced that he had selected D.C. federal judge Brett M. Kavanaugh.

Anti-abortion advocates see the nomination of Kavanaugh as the closest they’ve come to overturning Roe v. Wade in years, and both sides are braced for a fight.

The liberal base is fired up about abortion rights, but Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer (N.Y.) will seek to emphasize access to affordable health care as much as Roe v. Wade in the battle over the Supreme Court. In sharp contrast to the Obama era, Schumer thinks health care is the Democrats’ best weapon. By putting the charged issue of women’s reproductive rights within the broader framework of access to health care, the matter is likely to be less polarizing in red states.
U.S.-China Trade War Could Affect Opioid Epidemic

The American struggle to curb opioid addiction could become collateral damage in President Trump’s showdown on trade, says Kaiser Health News. A new round of tariffs specifically targeting China took effect last week, and that China focus could interrupt other trade-related issues — specifically, those targeting the stream of dangerous drugs like fentanyl into the United States.

Though Chinese officials deny that most of the fentanyl or other opioid substances originate in their country, they have in the past cooperated with efforts to control the flow of fentanyl onto American soil. U.S. law enforcement and drug investigators consider China the primary source of this illicit drug and responsible for as much as 90 percent of the world’s supply.

If the tariffs become permanent, though, “it’s most likely going to have a negative effect on other areas” beyond trade, said Jeffrey Higgins, a former Drug Enforcement Administration supervisory special agent. “China could say ‘We are no longer going to cooperate with the United States on controlling these synthetic opioids.’”

10 Tips Every Young Physician Should Know

New physicians often find they have a lot of concerns early in their careers:

- How do I balance my home life with physician life?
- I really want to do a research study. How do I start?
- How do I get involved in my specialty’s society?
- I am overwhelmed with clinical duties. How do I negotiate for nonclinical time?

A veteran physician shares answers and tips in this helpful blog from Kevin MD.

Administration Suspends Billions in Payments, Slashes Grants

The Trump administration is freezing payments under an Obamacare program that protects insurers with sicker patients from financial losses, a move expected to add to premium increases next year, reports the Associated Press.

At stake are billions in payments to insurers with sicker customers. The latest administration action could further disrupt the Affordable Care Act.

In a weekend announcement, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said the administration is acting because of conflicting court ruling in lawsuits filed by some smaller insurers who question whether they are being fairly treated under the program.

Many insurers that enroll large numbers of unhealthy people depend on the “risk adjustment” payments, which are intended to reduce the incentives for insurers to seek out healthy consumers and shun those with chronic illnesses and other pre-existing conditions.

Also, the Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it was slashing grants to nonprofit organizations that help people obtain health insurance under the ACA, the latest step in an escalating attack on the law that threatens to destabilize its insurance markets. The cuts are the second round in two years. The government will provide $10 million this fall, down from $36 million last autumn and $63 million in late 2016 — a total reduction of more than 80 percent.
3 Easy Steps to Identify Undercoding

You may be leaving money on the table by undercoding Evaluation & Management (E&M) services.

RAM member and administrator of Gastrointestinal Specialists Inc. Lucien W. Roberts III offers ways to untap a hidden revenue stream in this article from Physicians Practice.

He writes: Medicare, Medicaid and commercial payers collect utilization data when processing claims. Each has its own utilization data by specialty, and each payer uses specialty specific data to identify outliers who are overcoding. This data has another use, though, and that is for physicians to assess if they are undercoding relative to their peers. Therein lies an opportunity for you to potentially increase revenues.

Va. Lawmakers Call For More Mental Health Resources, Tighter Gun Laws

Three Democratic lawmakers serving on a special committee on school safety are asking House of Delegates Speaker Kirk Cox to consider putting more mental health counselors inside Virginia schools and new gun laws that could make it harder for minors to access firearms, reports the Times-Dispatch.

Dels. Schuyler VanValkenburg, Jeff Bourne and Mike Mullin outlined 13 policy recommendations as they called for a more “comprehensive approach” to securing schools following February’s mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla.

The gun-related proposals from the Democratic delegates include adding stricter penalties for improper gun storage around minors, stronger reporting rules for lost or stolen weapons, and broadening a law that limits when minors can possess firearms.

The Democratic lawmakers also suggested creating a “risk warrant protective order” for minors that could allow courts to intervene if students are determined to be threats to themselves or others, including potentially removing guns from a student’s home.

Cox created the Select Committee on School Safety in March, with a caveat that the panel would not focus on gun laws to avoid partisanship and would zero in on less controversial policy changes that can be considered in the 2019 General Assembly session.

Inside the Secretive World of Drug Pricing

For years, every Pharmacy Benefit Manager has refused to disclose the “rebates” that it earns on a drug-by-drug basis. As a result, no one has been able to detect the “net cost” of any drug (factoring in rebates), which means no one can assess whether a PBM’s formularies and programs favor higher-cost or lower-cost drugs. Every PBM has also refused to disclose how much in “other monies” the PBM is secretly being paid by manufacturers to favor the manufacturers’ products.

But recently, Express Scripts filed a lawsuit against the drug manufacturer kaleo, and while Express Scripts’ lawyers heavily redacted the Complaint, they did not redact certain information that Express Scripts has long maintained as closely guarded secrets.

Here’s a peek at what the lawsuit revealed about the secretive process of drug pricing.

Free From Thai Cave, Boys May Still Face Health Problems

The world rejoiced this week with the news that all 13 members of a Thai soccer team trapped in a cave
since June 23 had been rescued. After they emerged, all were rushed to the hospital.

As Thai doctors conducted a battery of tests, physicians around the world speculated on the health effects of such an ordeal.

Medical specialists who are not involved in treating the boys said that while the risk of serious infection is low, they could face other short- or long-term complications, including post-traumatic stress disorder, reports The New York Times.

The boys are now in different stages of recovery after more than two weeks in the dark cave. All are still quarantined, and the first group out has been able to adjust to normal lighting, but latter ones are still wearing sunglasses. Although the likelihood of serious infection is small, specialists said they were taking precautions in case the boys acquired a rare disease while stuck in the cave.

Alzheimer’s Drug Shows Some Promise in Early Tests

An experimental Alzheimer’s drug showed positive results and raised hopes that pharmaceutical companies were moving closer to a medicine that could finally disrupt the disease’s memory-robbing course, though a string of failures shadow the efforts, says The Wall Street Journal.

Biogen Inc. and Japan’s Eisai Co. announced that their experimental drug showed positive signs, slowing the progression of Alzheimer’s disease compared with a placebo in study subjects taking the highest dose. The companies also said the drug reduced the amount of clumps of a protein called beta amyloid that build up in the brains of patients.

Data are preliminary — the companies released topline results from a mid-stage study looking for the right dose — and researchers warned other, similar medicines also showed promise early, only to fail during subsequent and more extensive testing.

Want to Be Happier? Eat Your Popcorn With Chopsticks

It happens fast: You crack open a bottle of your favorite drink and put it to your lips. The delicious flavor is nearly overwhelming. But a minute later, you’re barely noticing the taste as you drink it.

This satiation, known as hedonic adaptation, occurs for nearly everything that makes us happy, says The Washington Post. Look around and think of how much you initially enjoyed the things that surround you. Then think about how much you enjoy them today.

The secret to getting the enjoyment back might be to mix it up a little.

A series of studies soon to be published in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin says that consuming things in unconventional ways enhances enjoyment of them. For example, one study showed that participants reported enjoying popcorn more when they ate it with chopsticks.

If you want some inspiration, check out this Reddit page with all sorts of unconventional ways to serve food.

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Thank you for being part of the Academy and its continuing conversation about the best practice of medicine.

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