



RAM

RICHMOND ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

Patient's Advocate • Physician's Ally • Community's Partner

The Leg Up

Local, state and national news of interest to the physician community

May 8, 2019

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Stop the Anti-Doctor Media Bias

This CNN headline was a **prime example of clickbait**: "[Feds charge doctors in 8 states in opioid bust, including 'Rock Doc' accused of trading pills for sex.](#)"

The only **problem with this headline?** Of the 60 individuals charged, half were not physicians, [notes this article](#) in Kevin MD. More importantly, the so-called "Rock Doc" who prescribed nearly 1.5 million pills of opioids and benzos often in exchange for sex, is not even a doctor at all; he's a nurse practitioner who had his nursing license restricted for similar accusations in November 2018.

The media seems to love to hate doctors.

For example, do a Google search of "physicians" and "NPR." At the top of the fold: "Are Doctors Overpaid?" followed by "Dollars for Docs: How Pharma Money Influences Physician Prescriptions." Several presidential candidates have been bashing physicians and nurses, too.

It seems that **doctors just can't win**. But worse, when physicians face excessive media criticism, **patients also lose**.

Physicians Got Fashion!

What a great night! Thank you to the two dozen local physicians who braved the runway Saturday to raise money for **Access Now**. And thanks to the many



donors who support high-quality care for thousands of area patients and to the practitioners who make it happen.

Couldn't make the show? Consider a donation to Access Now; [click here](#).

The Effects of Surgery on a Warming Planet

Sevoflurane is one of the most commonly used anesthesiology gases, [says NPR](#). The other big one is desflurane. There are others, too, like nitrous oxide, commonly known as laughing gas.

Whichever gas patients get, they breathe it in — but only about 5 percent is actually metabolized. The rest is exhaled. And to make sure the gas doesn't knock out anyone else in the operating room, it's sucked into a ventilation system.

And then? It's vented up and out through the roof, to mingle with other **greenhouse gases**.

Generally, unless there's a reason in a particular case to use one over the other, anesthesiologists simply tend to pick one of the two gases and stick with it. Few understand that one — desflurane — is much worse for the environment.

"When I look around and I see stewardship on display today, it's discouraging," anesthesiologist Brian Chesebro says. "I got depressed for a while, and so I hit the pause button on myself and said, 'Well, **what's the very best that I can do?**' "

Chesebro is one of many physicians who are trying to **cut back on their environmental footprint while still providing top-quality medical care**.

RAM's own **Isaac Wornom, MD**, was ahead of the trend, discussing this in a recent issue of [our Ramifications newsletter](#). He wrote, "I want all of us to begin to think about the vast amount of waste that exists in modern medical care today ... My guess is if we could eliminate the majority of this waste, we would have enough resources for all of us to have the **high-quality care** we need and want."



7 Common Mistakes Physicians Make When Signing a Physician Employment Contract (and How to Avoid Them)

Smart physicians are not immune from making highly regrettable mistakes when it comes to employment contracts. And unlike in medicine, you don't get the option of trying a new treatment plan if the first one doesn't work.

Physicians are educated, and intellectually sophisticated. This means that, even though you weren't trained to read legal contracts in medical school, courts expect that you have read and fully understand the terms of the contracts you sign.



That means that, both during and even after your employment, you're stuck with the contract you sign, so make sure you avoid these **common pitfalls**.

Nurses Strike to Protect 'Patients Over Profits'

Unionized nurses, technicians, and support staff at



Mercy Health St. Vincent Medical Center in Ohio, part of **Bon Secours Mercy Health**, went on strike this week amid an impasse over key bargaining issues, [reports The Toledo Blade](#).

The strike prompted employees and their supporters to line in front of the central city hospital after two bargaining units rejected their employer's "last, best, and final" contract offer. The two sides, which began negotiating July 30, met

Saturday with a federal mediator in an unsuccessful attempt to break the stalemate over health-care costs and on-call hours.

With cheers of "**patients over profits**" and "union strong," the crowd of marchers — many wearing scrubs or brightly colored union shirts — steadily made their way to the sidewalk outside the hospital.

Meanwhile, Mercy Health officials praised the "highly certified and competent" replacement workers they brought in.

A Plurality of Physicians Are Now Hospital Employees

Axios reports this week that for the first time ever, **the U.S. has more physicians who work as employees of a hospital system (47.4%) than those who run their own practice (45.9%)**, according to new survey data from the [American Medical Association](#).



Doctors have gradually shifted away from owning a practice — 75.8 percent were independent in 1983, and that number has been falling ever since. Consolidation has driven a lot of this change, as hospitals look to keep or grow their market share by controlling physician referrals.

This shift has a **big effect on costs**. Health insurers pay significantly more for routine patient visits when they are in a hospital-owned practice instead of an independent clinic — even though the services are the same. Medicare is trying to change that.

Next Week: RAM Networking Social at the Branch Museum



Join your RAM colleagues for our next **Member Networking Social** on Thursday, May 16 at the **Branch Museum of Architecture and Design** (that beautiful building on Monument Avenue that you always wanted to explore). Mingle with your RAM friends and colleagues while enjoying food and beverages in this stately Richmond landmark. Docent tours will be available at 6:30, 7 and 7:30 p.m.

[Details and registration can be found here.](#) RSVP now,

as space is limited.

Heart Failure Deaths on the Rise for Younger Americans

A recent **decline in heart failure-related deaths in the U.S. has reversed**, [says CNN](#), and those types of deaths are now **climbing nationwide**, especially among adults ages 35 to 64.

The trend, which also revealed some racial disparities, was found in a research paper published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology on Monday. The paper points to an increase in the prevalence of obesity and diabetes as possibly driving a parallel rise in heart failure deaths.

CBO Unveils the Cost of Medicare For All

The [Washington Post](#) reports that liberal Democrats' goal of transforming the U.S. health-care system into a single, government-financed model would be "**complicated, challenging and potentially disruptive**," according to the Congressional Budget Office.

In a new analysis, the CBO offers a reality check on the campaign slogans that have characterized a growing crop of Democratic presidential aspirants who champion the idea of Medicare-for-all. It lays out opportunities and risks of moving every American into a single government plan that covers all or most medical services.

Meanwhile, it says such a plan would produce **universal coverage** and probably a **more efficient health system.**" However, it is expected to result in higher government spending and taxes – and potentially longer waits for some treatments and technologies.

Is Conference Room Air Slowing You Down?

You're holed up with colleagues in a meeting room for two hours, hashing out a plan, [notes The New York Times](#). As you emerge, you realize it was much, much warmer and stuffier in there than in the rest of the office. Small rooms can build up heat and carbon dioxide from our breath — as well as other substances — to an extent that might surprise you. And as it happens, a small body of evidence suggests that **when it comes to decision making, indoor air may matter more than we have realized.**



[At least eight studies in the last seven years](#) have looked at what happens specifically in a room accumulating carbon dioxide, a main ingredient in our exhalations. While the results are inconsistent, they are also intriguing.

They suggest that while the kinds of air pollution known to cause cancer and asthma remain much more pressing as public health concerns, there may also be pollutants whose most detrimental effects are on the mind, rather than the body.

HHS Adds Religious Protections to Its OCR Website

The Sunlight Foundation's Web Integrity Project — which documents changes in language on federal websites — [finds](#) that the website for HHS' **Office of Civil Rights** has been changed to now include religious protections that were not previously outlined.

The new language explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex and religion, but notably **excludes sexual orientation.** Additionally, in multiple other places on the revamped webpage, there are new specifications that **HHS will prioritize religious freedom and conscience and moral objections.**

These changes come amid a nationwide ban on transgender individuals serving in the military as well as multiple measles outbreaks across the country fueled partly by people not vaccinating themselves or their children over religious objections. **It could have consequences for medicine as well.**

The city of San Francisco is suing the Trump administration over the new rule protecting religious freedom when it comes to medical care, [reports The Washington Post](#).

In a 'Lawless' World of Service Dogs, Many Families Suffer



[The Washington Post](#) has this interesting read: The **service dog industry** — particularly in the field of "psychiatric" service dogs for people with autism and post-traumatic stress disorder — has exploded in recent years. But a **near complete absence of regulation and oversight** has left needy, desperate families vulnerable to incompetence and fraud.

All the counseling, therapy and medication did little to ease 9-year-old Sobie Cummings' crippling anxiety and feelings of isolation. A psychiatrist suggested that a service dog might help.

To Glenn and Rachel Cummings, Mark Mathis seemed like a dream come true. His kennel, Ry-Con Service Dogs, was just a couple of hours away, and he, too, had a child with

autism. But what clinched the decision were Mathis' credentials. "In 2013, Mark was certified as a NC state approved service dog trainer with a specialty in autism service dogs for children," stated an online brochure.

Ten months and \$14,500 later, the family brought their "savior" home. But when they opened the front door, Okami broke from Glenn Cummings' grasp and began mauling one of the family's elderly dogs — all as Sobie watched.

It was only after they had returned Okami that the family learned that Mathis wasn't a state-certified dog trainer. In fact, no state has such a certification. Nor do many others.

Dems Turn Black Maternal Deaths Into 2020 Issue

The Hill reports that Democratic presidential candidates led by Sens. Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren are talking about an issue that hasn't historically received much attention on the campaign trail: the **high rates of pregnancy-related deaths** among black women.



For black women — a key voting bloc in the Democratic Party — issues of maternal mortality and racial disparities in health care have particular resonance, and that hasn't gone unnoticed by some of the top 2020 candidates, including Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker and Bernie Sanders.

This week, the **CDC issued a new report** that said for every five mothers dying in the United States from pregnancy and childbirth, three could have been saved if they had received better medical care. The report details how mothers are dying needlessly before, during and up to a year after giving birth from pregnancy-related complications and health conditions aggravated by childbirth. The agency's latest analysis of national maternal mortality data adds to the growing body of evidence that more than half of deaths are preventable.

Batter Up!



Make plans to join us for our **RAM Family Night** at The Diamond on **June 15** as the Richmond Flying Squirrels take on the New Hampshire Fisher Cats.

We'll have a private area reserved in the ballpark for our group to enjoy a picnic dinner and refreshments prior to and after the 6:05 p.m. opening pitch. In addition to **dinner** and the game, enjoy a visit from Nutzy and Nutasha, balloon creations and **fireworks** at the conclusion of the game.

No cost to members and their families but tickets are limited, so please reserve yours early so you don't strike out!

RESERVE YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

Check Out These Prize-Winning Medical Hacks

Over 700 applicants competed over the weekend in **MIT**

Hacking Medicine's Grand Hack contest, the largest health care hackathon in the U.S., says Stat. This year's winners vied for over \$15,000 in prizes in four disease areas: cancer, mental health, surgical outcomes, and assistive technology and rehabilitation. Winners included:

- Sneasy swab (third place, cancer): an improved nasal swab prototype that uses single-cell RNA sequencing of airway epithelial tissue to detect lung cancer early.
- Baas (third place, mental health): a daily evening journal for patients to record what they're grateful for, which helps to reframe their outlook and prevent sleep deprivation.
- Intellidose (first place, surgical outcomes): an intravenous delivery system that can be used in operating rooms.
- AltComm (second place, assistive technology): a mobile app to allow patients with speed and physical impediments to rely on eye-tracking and other responses to communicate with their providers.



Here's a List of Richmond's 'Top Docs'



Tovia Martirosian Smith with her father, Edward Martirosian (Photo: Richmond Magazine)

Richmond Magazine has (finally) published online its **2019 Top Docs** online. [Here's the complete list.](#)

Also, find profiles of several RAM members, including **Tovia Smith, MD**, **Johnny Wong, MD**, **Nicole Karjane, MD**, and **Leo Dunn, MD**.

'Unhappy' Meals Debuted in May

Axios reports that to highlight May as **Mental Health Awareness Month** Burger King announced the launch of not-so-happy meals. The Real Meal moods include the Pissed Meal, Blue Meal, Salty Meal, YAAAS Meal and DGAF Meal (and limited to certain cities, not including Richmond).



The move is part of a partnership with Mental Health America. The campaign has drawn a wide range of reactions on social media, with some suggesting it will help destigmatize mental health issues, while others suggest it's insensitive.

Thanks for Reading The Leg.Up!

We appreciate your comments. Keep 'em coming.

Feel free to contact me with your ideas, suggestions and concerns (or complaints). You can reach me by [email](#) or at (804) 622-8136.

Click [here](#) for past editions of The Leg.Up.

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