



## *January 2010 News Bulletin*

### *Health Care Reform Update 20:*

As you are most probably aware of by now, on the morning of 4 DEC, the Senate passed 60-39 a much amended H.R.3590, "The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. This vote and the previous House passage of this legislation is contrary with the growing sentiments of 2/3 of the American People who are against this "stealth" legislation. Regardless of which national poll you might consider this public disapproval of this legislation varies little from poll to poll. As the next step in the process is reconciliation of the significantly different House and Senate versions, but which neither makes provision to protect Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense health-care from the provisions of this legislation. Such protection would fulfill President Obama's promise made last August that neither program would "be affected by our efforts at broader health-care reform." Unless Tri-care, Tri-care for Life, and the VA health care programs are exempted from a proposed excise tax, veterans and military retirees face the very real prospect of paying a new tax on so-called "Cadillac" health care plans, which Tri-care and VA healthcare might easily be considered. As has been pointed out by a number of federal employee labor unions, such a tax would "have a discriminatory impact on plans that cover older workers and retirees. " Such excise tax could result in a tax increase of as much as 1.4% on veterans and military retirees and our widows, many of whom are retired on fixed incomes with no way to offset that additional tax other than by cutting back elsewhere in their family budgets.

If you could be impacted by this you have the option to contact your legislator and let him/her know of your concerns. Especially the very real potential that the near \$500 Billion cuts in Medicare will adversely impact Tricare and Tricare for Life which are directly indexed to Medicare. If Medicare goes away then so do Tricare and Tricare for Life. Urge your legislator to immediately seek an amendment to H.R.3590 to make it clear that nothing in the reconciled bill act shall interfere with VA or DOD existing authorities and that VA and DOD health care programs are excluded from any excise tax on health care programs. If H.R.3950 is not so amended then request that he/she vote AGAINST this legislation when it comes to the House floor for a vote.

To facilitate contacting your legislator USDR has provided an editable message at [http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=14493596&queueid=\[capwiz:queue\\_id\]](http://capwiz.com/usdr/issues/alert/?alertid=14493596&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) that addresses the issue and can be automatically forwarded to your representative.

[Source: USDR Action Alert 26 Dec 09 ++]

## *Life Expectancy:*

Life expectancy is up and the death rate is down, according to recent data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). From data collected in 2007, life expectancy for newborns reached a new high of 77.9, according to the latest mortality figures reported in Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2007. The figures are based on nearly 90% of all death certificates in the United States . The 2007 increase in life expectancy was the continuation of a long trend. Between 1997 and 2007, life expectancy increased by 1.4 years, from 76.5 years to 77.9 years. Other highlights of the report include:

- The average 65-year-old senior can now expect to live another 19 years or so, to nearly age 84.
- Record high life expectancy was recorded for both males (75.3 years) and females (80.4 years) in 2007. While the gap between male and female life expectancy has narrowed since the peak of in 1979, the 5.1 year difference recorded in 2007 is the same as in 2006.
- For the first time, life expectancy for black males reached 70 years.
- The U.S. death rate fell for the eighth year in a row to an all-time low of 760.3 deaths per 100,000 of the population in 2007. This is 2.1% lower than the 2006 rate of 776.5 and about half of what it was 60 years ago in 1947.
- Heart disease and cancer, the two leading causes of death, accounted for nearly half (48.5 percent) of all deaths in 2007.

Want to improve your longevity? In addition to getting exercise, regular medical checkups, and eating healthy food, researchers say that making time to travel and making new friends help to increase our longevity. Travel can increase longevity by helping people establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, says Dr. David Lipschitz, director of the Center on Aging at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. In a 10-year longevity study of people aged 70 and older, researchers at the Centre for Ageing Studies at Flinders University in Adelaide , Australia concluded:

- Close relationships with children and relatives had little effect on longevity rates for older people during the 10-year study.
- People with extensive networks of good friends and confidantes outlived those with the fewest friends by 22%.
- The positive effects of friendships on longevity continued throughout the decade, regardless of other profound life changes such as the death of a spouse or other close family members.

[Source: About.com Guide to Senior Living Sharon O'Brien article 26 Dec 09 ++]

## ***VA Hospital Report Card:***

For the second consecutive year, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has released a "hospital report card" as part of VA's effort to provide the public with a transparent accounting of the quality and safety of its care. In addition, for the first time, data from both the 2008 and 2009 reports will be available to the public in machine - readable format on [www.Data.gov](http://www.Data.gov). To empower Veterans and the public at large to track quality, safety and access to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities, VA's hospital report cards include raw data on care provided in outpatient and hospital settings, quality of care within given patient populations, and patient satisfaction and outcomes. VA issued its first facility - level report on quality and safety in MAY 08. As part of the Obama Administration's commitment to open government and accountability, VA highlights its rigorous quality programs and actions taken to address the issues VA identified from the last report.

The report gives the health care system high marks, with VA facilities often outscoring private - sector health plans in standards commonly accepted by the health care industry. "Patient - centric care is our mission," said Shinseki. "As Secretary, I am committed to continuing to meet and surpass our high standards of care each and every day. In addition to allowing VA to demonstrate the quality and safety of its care, the report card provides opportunities to enhance health services ... it will become a valuable resource of information for Veterans, stakeholders and the department ... It will allow VA's health care system to be forward looking and focused on advancement."

### *The 2009 report card highlighted:*

Marked improvements in smoking cessation counseling provided to 89% of Veteran patients, a 6% improvement from 2008 and among all ages at risk, 94% of Veterans received a pneumonia immunization, a 4% improvement.

There is more to be done for women Veterans. To address this priority and provide women Veterans with the highest quality care VA has implemented several initiatives, such as placement of women advocates in every outpatient clinic and medical center, and creating a "mini-residency" program on women's health for primary care physicians.

Minority Veterans are generally less satisfied with inpatient and outpatient care than other Veterans. In addition to targeting outreach efforts to these Veterans, a minority Veteran program coordinator has been placed in every medical center.

[Source: VA Press Release 9 Dec 09 ++]