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1. VHHA in Action

Each day, VHHA actively works on behalf of its members, their employees, and Virginians to advance the interests of Virginia's hospitals and health care systems. In the past week, here are some developments of interest to Virginia hospitals and health systems:

- **Virginia State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Shelton**, MD, recently sent a letter to health care providers across the Commonwealth providing information and updates on respiratory conditions including influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), as well as the availability of immunizations that offer protection against each of those illnesses. Read the letter [here](#).
- The **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)** recently finalized certain public reporting requirements for skilled nursing facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid. The requirements include disclosure of certain investor and private equity company relationships. Read more [here](#).
- CMS has begun displaying a "birthing friendly" hospital designation on the [Medicare Care Compare website](#). This first-of-its-kind designation is a reflection of high-quality maternity care that hospitals and health systems can earn by reporting their progress on the CMS Maternal Morbidity Structural Measure to the Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (IQR) Program, which identifies whether a hospital or health system has participated in a statewide or national perinatal quality improvement collaborative program and has implemented evidence-based quality interventions in hospital settings to improve maternal health. A hospital [mapping tool](#) can be accessed here. The designation was adopted last year as part of an update to the CMS Inpatient Quality Reporting Program. Read more [here](#).
- The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** Office of Information Security recently issued an alert about a relatively new ransomware group and strain known as BlackSuit

that is likely to be a credible threat to the health care and public health sector. Discovered in early May 2023, BlackSuit's striking parallels with Royal, the direct successor of the former notorious Russian-linked Conti operation, potentially places the group with one of the most active ransomware groups in operation today. BlackSuit operates using a double extortion method that steals and encrypts sensitive data on a compromised network. So far, the specific use of BlackSuit ransomware has been observed in a small number of attacks. The most recent suspected attack, in October 2023, was against a U.S.-based health care organization whose servers and systems were encrypted with malware, tentatively identified as BlackSuit. Read more [here](#).

- The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) recently approved the Zepbound (tirzepatide) injection for chronic weight management in adults with obesity [body mass index of 30 kilograms per square meter (kg/m²) or greater] or overweight (body mass index of 27 kg/m² or greater) with at least one weight-related condition (high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, or high cholesterol) for use, in addition to a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity. Tirzepatide, the active ingredient in Zepbound, is already approved under the trade name Mounjaro to be used along with diet and exercise to help improve blood sugar (glucose) in adults with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Read more [here](#). In other news, the FDA [recently cleared](#) for marketing the first over-the-counter antigen test for COVID-19. ACON Laboratories' Flowflex COVID-19 Antigen Home Test, originally authorized for emergency use in 2021, is now the second home COVID-19 test to successfully complete a traditional FDA premarket review pathway, and the first indicated for use in children under 18. A molecular home test received FDA clearance earlier this year.
- HHS recently issued a [final rule](#) explaining how the agency will address payment cuts previously imposed on certain hospitals that participate in the 340B Drug Pricing Program. Those payment cuts were deemed "unlawful" in a previous ruling by the **U.S. Supreme Court**. Under the plan, HHS will repay 340B hospitals that were underpaid from 2018 to 2022 in a single-lump sum payment and will reimburse hospitals the amount they would have received as cost-sharing payments from beneficiaries. Any hospital that believes the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has made an error in calculating its lump-sum payment should contact CMS detailing the error and any supporting documentation by emailing outpatientpps340B@cms.gov by 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 30. HHS also finalized its proposal to recoup funds from those hospitals that received increased rates for non-drug services from 2018 to 2022. HHS will recoup these funds by adjusting the outpatient prospective payment system conversion factor by minus 0.5 percent starting in calendar year 2026 — one year later than HHS had originally proposed and as AHA strongly advocated in its comments — making this adjustment until the full amount is offset, which the department estimates to be 16 years.
- To provide the health care community with timely information on emerging issues, VHHA will host a quarterly public health webinar series for Virginia hospitals and health systems featuring updates provided by VDH officials. Topics covered in this ongoing webinar series may include disease surveillance, modeling, influenza, RSV, and unique pathogens. Additional topics may vary depending on current events. See more information and register for this series through this [link](#).
- VHHA actively engages with the news media to share public messaging and coordinate member media appearances to showcase the important work done by Virginia hospitals. That includes recent coverage from [WAVY](#).

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2. VCCS Hosting Nov. 29 Healthcare Workforce Summit With VHHA, Stakeholder Groups

The **Virginia Community College System (VCCS)** is hosting a Healthcare Summit focused on workforce development and challenges on Nov. 29 from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at the **Brightpoint Community College** Chester Campus. The event is being hosted in conjunction with **Virginia Health and Human Resources Secretary John Littel**, the **Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association**, the **Claude Moore Foundation**, the **Virginia Health Care Association** and **Virginia Center for Assisted Living**, the **Virginia Dental Association**, and the **Virginia Chamber of Commerce**. The goal of the event is to build support among health care organizations and partners in preparation for legislative asks to support health care program offerings by Virginia's Community Colleges to promote workforce development efforts. The Summit will highlight what VCCS is already doing and strategies for scaling health care programs and pipelines across the Commonwealth and the health care spectrum (nursing, allied health, dental, and behavioral health). Participants will be asked to work collaboratively to develop plans to improve accessibility and quality of healthcare programs on a regional basis. See more information about the Summit [here](#).

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3. CMS Issues Proposed Policy Changes to Medicare Advantage, Prescription Drug Benefit Program

CMS recently released [proposed policy and technical changes](#) to the Medicare Advantage and Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Program, Medicare Cost Plan Program, and Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, and Health Information Technology Standards for contract year (CY) 2025. The proposal includes changes intended to strengthen beneficiary protections, promote access to behavioral health care providers, advance equity in coverage, and improve supplemental benefits in the Medicare Advantage (MA) program. This includes proposals to strengthen network adequacy standards for certain behavioral health provider types; streamline the appeals process for enrollees if their MA plan terminates coverage for certain post-acute care services; lay the groundwork for increasing data collection and reporting from Part C and D plans; annually review MA utilization management policies for health equity considerations; provide new guardrails for plan compensation to agents and brokers to prevent undue influence on beneficiary enrollment decisions; ensure that MA plans offer appropriate supplemental benefits; streamline enrollment for individuals dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid; standardize the appeals process for MA Risk Adjustment Data Validation audit findings; limit out-of-network patient cost-sharing for certain plans serving dually eligible enrollees; and give Part D plans more flexibility to substitute biosimilars for reference drug products. The deadline for public comments on the proposed changes is Jan. 5, 2024.

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4. FDA Approves First Vaccine to Prevent Disease Caused by Chikungunya Virus

The FDA recently approved Ixchiq, the first chikungunya vaccine. Ixchiq is approved for individuals 18 years of age and older who are at increased risk of exposure to the chikungunya virus. The chikungunya virus is primarily transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Chikungunya is an emerging global health threat with at least 5 million cases of infection reported during the past 15 years. The highest risk of infection is in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Americas where chikungunya virus-carrying mosquitos are endemic. However, the chikungunya virus has spread to new geographical areas causing a rise in global prevalence of the disease. The most common symptoms of chikungunya include fever and joint pain. Other symptoms may include a rash, headache, and muscle pain. Some individuals may experience debilitating joint pain that persists for

months or even years. Treatment includes rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications for pain and fever. Ixchiq is administered as a single dose by injection into the muscle. It contains a live, weakened version of the chikungunya virus and may cause symptoms in the vaccine recipient similar to those experienced by people who have chikungunya disease. The safety of Ixchiq was evaluated in two clinical studies conducted in North America in which about 3,500 participants 18 years of age and older received a dose of the vaccine with one study including about 1,000 participants who received a placebo. The most commonly reported side effects by vaccine recipients were headache, fatigue, muscle pain, joint pain, fever, nausea and tenderness at the injection site. Read more [here](#).

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5. FBI, CISA Provide Update on Threat of Scattered Spider, Royal Ransomware, and LockBit

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation** (FBI) and the **Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency** (CISA) issued a joint Cybersecurity Advisory (CSA) in response to recent activity by Scattered Spider threat actors against the commercial facilities sectors and subsectors, including health care organizations. The advisory provides tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) obtained through FBI investigations as recently as November 2023. Scattered Spider is a cybercriminal group that targets large companies and their contracted information technology (IT) help desks. Scattered Spider threat actors, per trusted third parties, have typically engaged in data theft for extortion and have also been known to utilize BlackCat/ALPHV ransomware alongside their usual TTPs. Read more [here](#). The agency also issued a joint CSA on [#StopRansomware: Royal Ransomware](#). The updated advisory provides network defenders with additional information on tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and indicators of compromise (IOCs) associated with Royal ransomware variants. FBI investigations identified these TTPs and IOCs as recently as June 2023. Royal ransomware attacks have spread across numerous critical infrastructure sectors including, but not limited to, manufacturing, communications, health care and public health care, and education. CISA encourages network defenders to review the updated CSA and to apply the included mitigations. See [#StopRansomware](#) for additional guidance on ransomware protection, detection, and response. Another joint CSA has been issued in response to LockBit 3.0 ransomware affiliates and multiple threat actor groups exploiting CVE-2023-4966. Labeled Citrix Bleed, the vulnerability affects Citrix's NetScaler web application delivery control (ADC) and NetScaler Gateway appliances. Read more [here](#).

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6. VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features VCU Children's Hospital Pediatrician on Food Insecurity

The latest episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features an interview with **Dr. Bergen Nelson**, a pediatrician at **Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU**, for a conversation about her career and past work as a New York City school teacher, some of her areas of research interest, the topic of food insecurity, and more. Listen to the episode [here](#) and hear past episodes through this [link](#). Podcast episodes are also available through these podcast apps and networks: [Apple Podcast](#), [Amazon Music](#), [Spotify](#), [Pandora](#), [Google Podcasts](#), [Stitcher](#), [Tuneln](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Blubrry](#), [iHeart Radio](#), [Deezer](#), [Podbay](#), [Overcast](#), [Pocket Casts](#), the [Virginia Audio Collective](#), the [Public Health Podcast Network](#), the [World Podcast Network](#), and the [Family Podcast Network](#). The podcast can also be heard on the radio airwaves – episodes air each Saturday at noon and Sunday at 10 a.m. on 100.5 FM, 107.7 FM, 92.7 FM, and 820 AM across Central Virginia and 1650 AM in Hampton Roads, and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. on 93.9 FM in Richmond. Send questions, comments, feedback, or guest suggestions to pcfpodcast@vhha.com. – Will Selden

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7. Qualivis to Host Dec. 1 Webinar on the Value of Virtual Nursing

Qualivis, a **VHHA Shared Services** partner, is hosting a webinar at 1 p.m. on Dec. 1 focused on health systems in the midst of shifting towards virtual nursing, a novel approach to care that has the potential to elevate patient experience, enhance nurse job satisfaction, and yield substantial operational and financial advantages for health care organizations. Register for the webinar [here](#).

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8. CMS Proposes Rule Impacting Medicare Providers Blocking Access to Electronic Health Information

CMS recently issued a proposed rule that would implement provisions of the 21st Century Cures Act specifying that a health care provider determined by the HHS Inspector General to have committed information blocking shall be referred to the appropriate agency to be subject to appropriate disincentives set forth through notice and comment rulemaking. In particular, this rulemaking would establish for health care providers a set of appropriate disincentives for health care providers using authorities under applicable federal law. The deadline for public comments on the proposed rule is Jan. 2. Read more [here](#).

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9. CMS Proposed Rule Highlights Standards for QHP Offered Through State Insurance Marketplaces

CMS recently released a [proposed rule](#) regarding standards for qualified health plans (QHP) offered through health insurance marketplaces for 2025. The proposed rule would require state-based marketplaces to comply with time and distance network adequacy standards for QHPs that are at least as stringent as those for the federally facilitated marketplace. CMS also proposes several changes to standardize and streamline state-based health insurance marketplace operations including changes related to call center standards and eligibility and enrollment platforms. The agency also proposes policies intended to make coverage enrollment easier and to improve access to dental benefits and prescription drugs. Read more [here](#).

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10. Around the State

Dr. K. Craig Kent, MD, CEO of **UVA Health** and Executive Vice President of Health Affairs at the University of Virginia; and **Wendy Horton**, PharmD, CEO of **UVA Health University Medical Center**, have been listed in the *Becker Hospital Review* 2023 60 health system CEO influencers [list](#).

Congratulations to **Angela Corpuz**, RPSGT, a polysomnographic technologist with **Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters (CHKD)** on receiving the **Virginia Academy of Sleep Medicine (VASM)** Technologist Award. This award recognizes a VASM technologist for exemplary service and contributions to the polysomnographic profession.

Stacey Vaught has been named President of **Centra Bedford Memorial Hospital**. She previously served as Chief Nursing Officer, Unit Manager of the Emergency Department, and Director of Nursing for Bedford Memorial Hospital. Read more [here](#).

Dr. Jeffrey Kim, MD, has been named Chief Medical Information Officer of **VCU Health**. He recently served as CMIO and medical director of digital health for Loma Linda University Health and assistant medical director for Loma Linda University Health Care Managed Care in Loma Linda, California. He earned his pre-medical basic health sciences certificate in microbiology/immunology from Virginia Commonwealth University, in addition to a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and doctor of medicine degree from Eastern Virginia Medical School. He completed a residency in family medicine at Michigan Medicine. Read more [here](#).

Dr. Curtis Sessler, MD, a **VCU School of Medicine** Professor, has been named VCU Innovator of the Year for his work in creating a “world standard” for determining ICU patient comfort. Read more [here](#). –
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