

WEEKLY COVERAGE OF NEWS, LAWS, REGULATION, AND LITIGATION AFFECTING MINNESOTA'S HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY

## IN BRIEF

### DHS EXTENDS RENEWAL PERIOD FOR STATE-SPONSORED HEALTH INSURANCE

On Dec. 31, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) announced an extended renewal period for about 64,000 people who would have been dropped from public health insurance for not getting necessary paperwork in on time.

About 134,500 MinnesotaCare and Medical Assistance cases were up for renewal, but those who submitted paperwork close to the Dec. 19 deadline may not have had their forms processed quickly enough to prevent the enrollee from receiving a closure notice. Those cases have been reopened for January health care coverage. DHS has issued notices of the extended January coverage and instructions on what is needed to continue health care coverage in February to enrollees who did not return their renewal forms and those whose renewal forms DHS was unable to process by Dec. 31.

### MNSURE ENROLLMENT REACHES NEARLY 68,000

MNsure announced that 67,680 Minnesotans have enrolled in a health plan through its online marketplace as of Jan. 4. That number is about 80 percent

## THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

### NEW RESIDENCY PROGRAM TO INCREASE PHYSICIANS IN RURAL NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

HealthPartners Institute for Education and Research is launching a new family medicine residency program in St. Croix Valley to help increase the number of physicians who practice in rural and underserved areas of Wisconsin.

HealthPartners will launch the Methodist Hospital Family Medicine Residency Program Rural Training Track in 2018 with the training of one resident. It expects to add an additional physician each year to a northwestern Wisconsin region beginning in 2021.

Residents will spend the first year of the three-year residency program training at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, and the second and third years training at Amery Hospital & Clinic or Westfields Hospital & Clinic in New Richmond. All residents in the program will have a rotation at Hudson Hospital & Clinic. The participating hospitals in Wisconsin are HealthPartners' critical access hospitals.

"This program meets a critical need in our community because one of the best predictors of where a physician will locate a practice is where he or she completes a medical residency," said Deb Rudquist, president and CEO of Amery Medical Center. About half of physicians end up working in the same state and often the same town where they completed a residency, according to the Rural Health Research Center.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association released a report in 2011 that estimated the state would need to train or recruit an additional 100 physicians per year through 2030 to meet projected health care needs. "This program means that in coming years, more patients will not have to wait to see the doctor or have to drive longer distances to get care," said Andrew Dorwart, MD, St. Croix Valley medical director.

The program is being funded with a \$750,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

### WHITING CLINIC SOLD TO VISION GROUP HOLDINGS

Whiting Clinic in Minneapolis has been acquired by West Palm Beach, Florida-based Vision Group Holdings. The company operates the LASIK Vision Institute and TLC Laser Eye Centers and is the largest laser eye surgery provider in the U.S.

David Whiting, who is in the top 1 percent of LASIK surgeons in the



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## IN BRIEF

of MNsure's goal to enroll 83,000 Minnesotans by Jan. 31, the last day of the open enrollment period for 2016.

Of those enrolled in plans for 2016, about 40 percent are new customers to MNsure. The rest are renewals.

"These preliminary enrollment numbers are very encouraging," said Allison O'Toole, MNsure CEO. "We have more private plan enrollees now than we did at the end of the last open enrollment period."

Last year on Jan. 1, 28,217 had enrolled in private health plans through MNsure and by the end of the open enrollment period on Feb. 15, 60,092 had enrolled.

In addition to private plan enrollees, 15,072 Minnesotans have enrolled in MinnesotaCare, 35,153 have enrolled in Medical Assistance, and 5,597 have enrolled in a quality dental plan since Nov. 1.

### RIVER FALLS AREA HOSPITAL LAUNCHES NEW PATIENT CARE MODEL

Allina Health's River Falls Area Hospital implemented a new hospitalist program in late December, staffed by hospitalist doctors who only care for hospital patients instead of the primary care physicians who previously cared for them.

"We are excited to see our hospitalist program come to fruition," said David Miller, president of River Falls Area Hospital. "We believe patients will receive enhanced care, as there will be a dedicated physician onsite to care for them during any hospitalization. We also know this model will free up primary care doctors to spend more time in their clinics seeing patients."

The hospital has a professional services agreement with Vibrant Health Family Clinics to staff the hospitalist program and a lead hospitalist will be hired within the year.

## THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

U.S., founded Whiting Clinic in 2009. The clinic will continue to provide all its services, including comprehensive eye care, laser correction surgery, cataract surgery, and glaucoma treatments.

"I started Whiting Clinic with the goal of helping the people of the Twin Cities with any and all of their vision needs," said Whiting. "Working with Vision Group Holdings will enable me to ensure our patients receive the highest quality in care long into the future. I'm very excited about this new chapter and what this means for the clinic and for our patients."

### ANOKA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL FACING LOSS OF FEDERAL FUNDS

Emily Johnson Piper, Minnesota human services commissioner, has pledged to take action to address issues with patient safety, staff injuries, and overtime at the Anoka-Metro Regional Treatment Center.

The psychiatric hospital, operated by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), is at risk of losing about \$3.5 million per year in federal funds if it doesn't correct ongoing patient and staff safety issues. There were 48 aggression-related injuries involving 28 patients at the psychiatric hospital in 2015, a substantial increase from 38 injuries involving 24 patients in 2013. In addition, even though there have been 42 staff members hired since September, 43 positions remain vacant. Many employees leave because they have been forced to work overtime to make up for the staff vacancies.

Johnson Piper expects the process to begin with meetings between management and labor to discuss solutions to problems related to mandated overtime, staff retention, and recruitment. She has visited the facility twice since her appointment to the position in early December and met with hospital staff on Christmas Day.

Johnson Piper also has plans to partner with the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to address patient care issues. This past summer, CMS conducted an onsite review at the psychiatric hospital and put it on notice of being in immediate jeopardy of losing the ability to bill Medicare and Medicaid for services provided to patients. DHS has until March 5 to complete the plan, according to a Dec. 11 letter from CMS. The process will begin with bringing in outside experts to address concerns raised by CMS, including nursing services, patient rights, quality assurance, and performance improvement.

"Changes need to start now....We have a tremendous amount of work in front of us," Johnson Piper said in a message to employees. "But it's work necessary to ensure that Anoka is the kind of quality program our patients, staff, and the people of Minnesota deserve."

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## IN BRIEF

**NORTH MEMORIAL TO EXPAND VIRTUAL CARE CAPABILITIES**

North Memorial Health Care has announced a partnership with telemedicine solutions company Health Net Connect.

North Memorial Health Care will use Health Net Connect's virtual care products and services to offer virtual second opinions to patients, provide remote patient monitoring capabilities, and implement new solutions for patient triage in the field in a community paramedic program.

"This partnership brings together North Memorial Health Care's physician-led provider network with HNC's virtual solutions to deliver high-quality, coordinated patient care in our ambulatory and community settings," said Saurin Patel, MD, chief medical officer at North Memorial Health Care.

**ZIPNOSIS RAISES \$17 MILLION TO EXPAND**

Minneapolis-based telehealth company Zipnosis has raised \$17 million in its first round of venture capital to fund expansion efforts. It plans to double its 30-person staff.

The company was founded six years ago when it launched its product, which provides virtual health care solutions for patients and health care systems. It allows health care systems to launch their own branded version of the technology to offer patients virtual care, meaning they can offer telehealth services without adding staff.

"Minnesota is the ideal spot for us to incubate and become the leader in virtual care," said Jon Pearce, Zipnosis CEO. "Our health care savviness is exceptional and health care partners such as Fairview and North Memorial have been pivotal early partners."

## THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

**STATEWIDE ASPIRIN CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE CARDIOVASCULAR RISK LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE**

A public health campaign to improve Minnesotans' knowledge of aspirin use for lowering risk of a first heart attack or stroke is likely beneficial and cost-effective, according to a study by University of Minnesota researchers published recently in the Journal of the American Heart Association (JAHA).

The University of Minnesota launched the public health campaign, "Ask About Aspirin," in June 2015 to inform the public and improve knowledge about aspirin as a preventive medication. The campaign's target population is men ages 47 to 79 and women ages 55 to 79.

In addition, JAHA published a second study, also led by University of Minnesota researchers, which found that aspirin use for the primary prevention of heart attack and stroke rose steadily in the Minneapolis/St. Paul adult population from 1980 to 2009.

"Despite the steady increase in aspirin use, we found many adults who would benefit from aspirin use are not taking it," said Russell Luepker, MD, MS, professor of epidemiology and community health at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and co-author of the study. "We also found no associated trend for increased gastrointestinal bleeding observed in the Minneapolis/St. Paul study population, a reassuring outcome."

It was previously unclear whether these types of efforts would be effective in reducing cardiovascular events and health care costs. Researchers from the University of Minnesota's division of cardiology and School of Public Health estimate that almost 10,000 fewer heart attacks and at least 1,200 fewer strokes would occur as a result of improving public knowledge of aspirin use, which would in turn lower overall health care costs. There is a small associated risk of bleeding with aspirin use, which can be lowered when patients and doctors discuss the benefits versus risks.

"There is no other single cardiovascular medication as effective and inexpensive as aspirin," said Alan T. Hirsch, MD, professor of cardiology at the University of Minnesota Medical School and senior author of the study. "Yet, despite the prior publication of national guidelines that have recommended increased use of aspirin, no prior state or national effort has effectively promoted such use. It is always our hope that such state programs, designed to achieve maximum individual benefit and lowest personal risk, can be created with positive measured clinical and economic impact. These data demonstrate that the health and economic impact would be immense."



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