HALL RENDER'S THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON – MARCH 9, 2018

AZAR PUSHES VALUE-BASED CARE APPROACH

During the annual policy conference for the Federation of American Hospitals, Health and Human Services ("HHS") Secretary Alex Azar laid out an agenda for a more cost-effective and transparent health care system. Azar said HHS is focused on four key priorities: giving consumers greater control over health information through interoperable and accessible health IT; encouraging transparency from payers and providers; using experimental models in Medicare and Medicaid to drive value and quality throughout the entire system; and removing government burdens that impede this transformation. The overall goal of these initiatives is to shift to value-based care.

HHS is looking to use Medicare and Medicaid to transform the health care arena since the programs have the size and concentration to drive change within the system. Calling the results of previous efforts to drive innovation, such as accountable care organizations "lackluster," Azar stated the results were not surprising since providers did not have enough ability to experiment with arrangements necessary to take on the risk of a patient's outcome. Azar also promised the government would address any regulatory burdens that impede progress toward value-based care provisions, which is expected to include regulatory changes to the Stark Law.

CMS ANNOUNCES NEW PLAN TO OVERHAUL ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS PROGRAM

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services ("CMS") announced a new initiative called MyHealthEData aimed at decreasing barriers that prevent patients from accessing and controlling their medical records. By giving patients complete access to their own data, patients can choose a provider and give the provider secure access to that data. Part of this program includes the revival of the Medicare Blue Button initiative, which is intended to allow patients to download their health data with one click. CMS Administrator Seema Verma highlighted other ways CMS plans to "empower patients with data," such as requiring providers to update their systems to ensure data sharing, requiring patients' data to follow them after discharge from a hospital and working to reduce the incidence of unnecessary and duplicative testing that occurs as a result of providers not sharing data. Verma said CMS is working to streamline documentation and billing requirements for providers to allow doctors to spend more time with their patients and reduce administrative burdens.

SENATE HELP COMMITTEE TO HOLD 340B HEARING NEXT WEEK

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions ("HELP") Committee will hold a full committee hearing on Thursday, March 15. It was expected there would be a 340B-focused hearing after Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) introduced a 340B reform bill that was referred to the committee. Another 340B reform bill was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and is referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

HEALTH-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED THIS WEEK

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) introduced S. 2523 to amend Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide coverage under the Medicare program for FDA-approved qualifying colorectal cancer screening blood-based tests.

Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. (D-NJ) introduced H.R. 5197 to direct the HHS Secretary to conduct a demonstration program to test alternative pain management protocols to limit the use of opioids in emergency departments.

NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON

The House and Senate return for a full week of legislative work. Lawmakers will focus on finalizing a $1.3 trillion omnibus spending bill that must pass by March 23 in order to avoid another government shutdown. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said he is aiming for a vote on the measure next week to give extra breathing room ahead of the deadline. In addition to the HELP Committee hearing on 340B, the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee will hold a hearing on Thursday regarding the fiscal year 2019 HHS Budget.

THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON IN HISTORY

1967: 50 years ago this week, President Lyndon B. Johnson announces his plan to establish a draft lottery for military service. The days of the year would be written on slips of paper. These pieces of paper would be dumped into a glass jar and drawn one at a time. September 14

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would be the first date drawn.

1820: 198 years ago this week, the Missouri Compromise is enacted by Congress and signed by President James Monroe, providing for the admission of Missouri into the Union as a slave state but allowing Maine to join as a free state. In passing the bill, Congress intended to equalize the number of slave-holding and free states in the U.S.

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