The Leg.Up
Local, state and national news of interest to the physician community
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Will General Assembly Operate on Budget?

The plot thickens in the General Assembly's budget impasse.

Signs of governmental dyspepsia are popping up like hungry squirrels on Capitol Square. Exhibit A: "With no sign of progress in a state budget standoff,
Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring has hired a constitutional law expert to advise him," reports The Washington Post. This is "the clearest sign yet that the state is barreling toward a government shutdown and uncharted legal territory."

This development comes after "key Republican ally" Sen. Emmitt W. Hanger offered a plan last week to break the budget logjam over Medicaid expansion.

"But he also split with the governor by questioning [Gov. Terry] McAuliffe's power to keep government running without a budget or to expand Medicaid on his own."

Hanger's plan "asks both sides to give a little, divorcing the Medicaid issue from the budget as opponents want, but also remaking a state Medicaid commission so it could no longer block expansion."

The Post reports Hanger's proposal "made the plan somewhat more appealing to the GOP-dominated House, which opposes expansion, than to the evenly divided Senate, which narrowly supports it with the backing of Hanger and two other Republicans."

AG Herring's move - seeking outside legal counsel - resembled the help his Republican predecessor (Ken Cuccinelli) sought in trying to navigate the treacherous waters of the "gift-gate" scandal that swamped the McDonnell administration.

Herring has hired a well-known professor of law and public affairs at UVa. - A.E. Dick Howard - to work at state expense at the rate of $500 an hour to study the sticky constitutional issues at play.

The move drew instant rebukes from the GOP. "Taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for the administration to navigate the consequences of its own obstruction," said Garren Shipley, a state GOP spokesman.

(It seems just like yesterday that the Democrats were saying that about Cuccinelli's hiring expensive outside lawyers.)

However one views such matters, there's no doubt that Howard is the right man to interpret the fine print in the Va. Constitution: he helped redraft it in 1971. "His advice to Herring will be considered confidential," the Post reports.

Meanwhile, two retired admirals from the U.S. Navy urged Hampton Roads legislators to use the private Marketplace Virginia option to expand Medicaid services for the uninsured.

"Vice Admiral Henry Griffin III (ret.) and Rear Admiral John T. Kavanaugh (ret.) said about 12,300 veterans who
don't have health care coverage now could gain coverage if Virginia adopted a private market alternative to Medicaid expansion," reports The Daily Press of Newport News.

Access Now "Positively Richmond" On WRIC 8

The fantastic work of Access Now's more than 900 physician volunteers was recognized in this recent broadcast by WRIC 8 in its "Positively Richmond" segment.

Program Manager Marilyn Nicol told WRIC's Amy Lacey that 9,000 people have been seen in more than 25,000 appointments since Access Now was launched in 2008 by RAM.

Lacey interviewed Grey Garrett, star of "Beyond the Rainbow," the Judy Garland life story/musical at Swift Creek Mill Theatre. Click here for a glowing review!

Garrett credits the treatment of her skin cancer for saving her life and her acting career, since, as Lacey noted, "her face was part of her livelihood."

Garrett was treated by Dr. Christine Rausch, a dermatologist and Mohs surgeon at the Skin Surgery Center of Virginia, and by Dr. Alan J. Burke, a facial, plastic and reconstructive surgeon at Virginia Ear Nose & Throat Associates, plus other generous volunteers.

Grey Garrett

(2nd from left) with Drs. Christine and Mark Rausch, and Leslie Bachmann, practice manager of Skin Surgery Center of Va.
Dr. Koontz Appointed to State Board by Gov. McAuliffe

Congratulations to Warren W. Koontz Jr., MD, for his recent appointment to the state Board of Long-Term Care Administrators!

Dr. Koontz was president of the Richmond Academy of Medicine in 1989 and has been an invaluable member of the Oral History Committee among many other contributions to RAM.

RAM Featured on NPR

RAM's May 13 General Meeting was the subject of this report on WCVE/NPR Richmond, as John Ogle interviewed Barry DuVal, President and CEO of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

See the related video as DuVal explains the Chamber's agenda, particularly its Blueprint Virginia for economic growth. DuVal told RAM members: "I want you to know I consider you business people."

Shinseki Steps Down at V.A.
The recent resignation of Gen. Eric Shinseki amid the "wait list scandal," led to this provocative Forbes column which advocates using free market principles to change the long-standing logjams for patient care around the country.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is "our own homegrown experiment in 200-proof socialized medicine," said one doctor writing for Forbes, and "is a highly political creature controlled by Congress."

Columnist Doug Bandow praises the things the V.A. does well -- such as trauma cases, IT and case management -- but said "access is fundamental" to its success. Staffing shortages led to rationing and the ensuing shortage, he writes, adding, "Government should put money into veterans' hands to purchase insurance tailored to their special needs."

He makes other points in favor of privatizing parts of the system, which seems to be favored by Republican leaders in the House and Senate, such as Arizona Sen. John McCain.

Click here for an NPR report on the idea of increasing private health offerings to unplug the care pipeline for our nation's veterans.

The V.A.'s deeply entrenched problems were laid out in this column by Dr. Sam Foote, who spent 19 years as director of an outpatient clinic at the V.A. hospital in Phoenix, scene of some of the most egregious cases of mismanagement and mistreatment of veterans.

"My decision to become a whistle-blower after 24 years as a physician in a Veterans Affairs hospital was, at first, an easy one. I knew about patients who were dying while waiting for appointments on the V.A.'s secret schedules, and I couldn't stay silent."

MSV Special House of Delegates Session

A special thank you to the following RAM members who attended MSV's Special House of Delegates session this past weekend. In addition to finishing up the work of Reference Committees from the October 2013 session, delegates were able to vote on a number of proposed amendments to the
MSV bylaws which will allow the Medical Society of Virginia to conduct business at the House of Delegates on behalf of their membership.

Samuel T. Bartle, MD
Harry D. Bear, MD
J. Paul Bullock Jr., MD
John F. Butterworth IV, MD
Richard Carter, MD
Clifford L. Deal III, MD
Egidio del Fabbro, MD
Siobhan S. Dunnavant, MD
Suzanne M. Everhart, MD
Helen M. Foster, MD
Joseph S. Galeski III, MD
Ranjodh S. Gill, MD
Zubair U. Hassan, MD
Jyoti P. Kapil, MD
Joseph M. Karch, MD
Hazle S. Konerding, MD
Karsten F. Konerding, MD
Ritsu Kuno, MD
Walter Lawrence Jr., MD
Ibe Mbanu, MD
Thomas L. Moffatt, MD
Kavegh Ofogh, MD
Susan Prizzia, MD
Dianne Reynolds-Cane, MD
Richard A. Szucs, MD
Susan J. Waller, MD
Johnny C.L. Wong, MD
Peter A. Zedler, MD

Pre-Authorization Blues?

We've been checking out members' complaints about insurers making it even harder (is that possible?) to get pre-authorizations for treatments and prescriptions.

Our friends at the Medical Society of Virginia tell us that MSV has a working group studying ways to address the issue, including RAM members Dr. Suzanne Everhart (Everhart Eye Associates) and Bert Wilson (Dermatology Associates of Virginia).

As we continue to monitor the situation, check out MSV's recent survey results. Among the findings:

- Most concerns are with prescription pre-authorizations.
- Average pre-authorization takes from 12 to 23 minutes, with radiology on the low end of the spectrum, and procedures on the high end.
- Members support a common "pre-auth" form that could
be used across payers, with a limited number of elements. Complaints include "reduced access to care; time away from patients; increased staffing; divert clinical staff from patient care to paperwork."

"Behold the Weirdness" of SGR and "The Doc Fix"

This Times-Dispatch editorial mocks the "absurdity of the American health care system" as illustrated by the repeated - and seemingly futile - efforts in Congress to change the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) for Medicare payments.

Spring Ramifications Profiles VCU School of Medicine

Click here and see "Latest News" to read the Spring 2014 edition of Ramifications.

We profile Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Medicine's adoption of its first new curriculum in 30 years and the opening of a cool new education center that matches form and function for medical students.

Read interviews with the key architects of this change, including Med School Dean Jerome F. Strauss, and an eloquent first-person article by second year medical student Shikha Gupta ("A time to be cherished"); RAM President Dr. Peter Zedler's thoughts on the many rough waters facing physicians today ("Sea of Change").

And don't miss Dr. Isaac Wornom's reflections on his own med school experience ("The making of doctors: looking back, looking forward").

We also launch a series about RAM members serving in combat, starting with Dr. Clifford L. Deal, who returned last year from service in Afghanistan as an Army surgeon.
How Many Patients Should a Doc See Each Week?

In light of the V.A.'s "wait list" scandal, Washington Post health blogger Lenny Bernstein "began to wonder what a normal caseload would look like for an average physician outside the VA system. And if your doctor has a larger-than-average caseload, is he or she able to give you the attention you need?"

He cites a 2013 survey by the American Academy of Family Physicians that notes the average member of that group has just over 93 "patient encounters" each week - or 19 patients per day.

The patient overload may be easing a bit, he writes.

"Move It or Lose It!"

The Physician Within offers a seminar on movement and exercise, *"Move It or Lose It," July 23, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.* in the dining room of First Baptist Church, 2709 Monument Ave., Richmond, VA 23220, at the corner of Monument and Boulevard.

Movement and exercise benefit us far more than many realize. We know about athletes who train for strength, stamina, flexibility and balance. We presume there are benefits for the musculoskeletal system. They also are essential to good heart health and endurance.

What we don't know, perhaps, is that movement and exercise, whether rigorous or simple, also greatly benefit our nervous systems (both the central and peripheral nervous systems), our gastrointestinal systems, our vascular systems, metabolism -- even our self-image, enthusiasm, independence and sleep patterns.

Are any of those lacking or deficient? Movement and exercise, even in a wheelchair, may not be a panacea, but they can restore or improve all of the above and more. Authorities will teach us the mechanics and physiology behind these health benefits. They will provide insights for youthful athletes, non-athletes, moms and dads, the elderly and the infirm.
HCA’s Tim McManus: "I Am Every Patient"

Tim McManus, CEO of HCA Virginia’s Chippenham and Johnston-Willis hospitals, is profiled in this week’s Times-Dispatch. He shares the personal side of his story, including a diagnosis of cardiac and pulmonary sarcoidosis, a rare medical condition that caused problems with his heart’s electrical circuitry.

"I am every patient," he says, "because at the end of the day, I’m not a suit anymore. I am not somebody who is there looking at numbers. I am not somebody who needs to be thinking about all the things that make this hospital operate. I’m there just like you. I’m there to help our patients."

HCA recently reported a strong first quarter despite the impact of Obamacare.

What Happens When A Doctor Commits Suicide?

"An obstetrician is found dead in his bathtub. Gunshot wound to the head. An anesthesiologist dies of an overdose in a hospital closet. A family doctor is hit by a train. He’s decapitated. An internist at a medical conference jumps from his hotel balcony to his death. All true stories," writes medical author Dr. Pamela Wible in KevinMd.com.

"What are patients to do?"

Some 400 doctors a year die from suicide, she writes, so it’s not an idle question.

The awkwardness starts with patients when they call for
appointments. "Patients are told they can't see their doctor. Ever. The standard line: "Sorry, your doctor died suddenly.""

"In most towns, news spreads fast no matter how veiled the euphemisms. Trust me, when a physician under 50 is found dead, it's suicide until proven otherwise."

"The fact is nearly 1,000,000 Americans will lose their physicians to suicide this year."

"So what's the proper response? Deliver flowers to the clinic? Send a card to surviving family? As far as I know, physician suicide etiquette has never been discussed - anywhere."

"Etiquette is defined as the customary code of polite behavior in society or among members of a particular profession or group. The customary way to deal with suicide is to ignore it. Physician suicide is rarely uttered aloud - even at the memorial service. We cry. We go home. And doctors keep dying."

"I've been a doctor for 20 years. I've never lost a patient to suicide. I've lost only friends, colleagues, lovers - all male physicians. In the U. S. we lose over 400 physicians per year to suicide - the equivalent of an entire medical school gone!"

"What can we do? Let's break the taboo."

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Magazine Touts "Physicians Got Fashion" Show

Click here for the online edition of Richmond magazine's profile of the March 29 fundraiser by the Richmond Academy of Medicine Alliance Foundation.

"The event raised $40,000 for Access Now, Sexual Assault Crisis Kits, nursing and allied professional scholarships and the Medical Society of Virginia Foundation," the magazine reports.

The event was attended by more than 200 people at the Tuckahoe Woman's Club.

RAM members showed great flair modeling clothing from Nellie George, Tiffanys Bridal,
Plaid Racquet and more.

Congratulations to the wonderful volunteers of the RAMA Foundation, and to the physicians who sparkled when they took off their white coats for a great cause!

A Moderate's Manifesto

A witty piece by Robert Strong, a political science professor at Washington and Lee University, about how hard it is to be moderate in today's highly-charged political environment.

"We moderates don't get much media attention," he writes. "Of course, we usually don't mind; we're moderate."

Are you a moderate? Here's one gauge from Strong: "I know that I'm a moderate because I can't stand to watch Fox News or MSNBC for more than a few minutes at a time.

"I can say 'bipartisan' without gagging.

"I am willing to pay taxes to support necessary government activities, and I neither love, nor loathe, the president."

Dr. Ritsu Kuno

Dr. Lang Liebman
The End of Food?

Has a high tech entrepreneur come up with a product to replace our meals? That’s the underlying question of this New Yorker article about a Silicon Valley synthetic food venture.

While some have suggested this could mark "the end of food," the developer said his product - "Soylent" - isn't meant to replace food, but rather as a nutritious alternative.

"Soylent" was named for the 1973 Charlton Heston sci-fi thriller, "Soylent Green." Thankfully, this product, unlike its namesake, isn't made from human flesh!

Before You Take Your Vacation, Some Planning Can Help You Relax

This Doctors' Company article cautions that "liability never takes a holiday." So make sure your vacation plans include medical coverage arrangements for your practice, particularly when you use locum tenens. These risk tips will help you enjoy your much-needed time off and also promote the safety of your patients.

McAuliffe Speaking in A.M. Event

Gov. Terry McAuliffe, who's in the eye of the storm over Medicaid expansion and the budget impasse, takes the stage tomorrow morning to deliver the opening keynote address at 8:30 a.m. June 5 on the second day of the 2014 Virginia Health Care Conference and Health Innovation Showcase.

The event began this morning as the Chamber partners with the Virginia Center for Health Innovation, the Medical Society of Virginia and the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association for the fourth consecutive year.
RAM also is a supporter.

Click here for more information.

What's Happening?

Check your RAM calendar here.

Check out back issues of The Leg.Up.

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