New Congress Brings Change, Offers Chance to Tell Provider Story

In a recent Provider interview, AHCA/NCAL’s president and CEO, Mark Parkinson, described how the split government and influx of new members of Congress will offer new opportunities and challenges for the long term and post-acute care (LT/PAC) profession.

According to Parkinson, the changing of the guard in the House to Democratic control will likely lead to gridlock on major legislation this year and headed into the presidential election year of 2020, and leave the regulatory activity at CMS the main center of attention for LT/PAC advocates.

However, he also noted that Congress will remain a focal point for possible oversight hearings and other activity as the profession weighs how a Democratic House, Republican Senate and Republican administration will affect LT/PAC priorities in the next two years.

“Each party advocates for things that help us, and each party advocates for things that hurt us," said Parkinson. “Democrats are good on Medicaid, and the fact they have control of the House now means that the Medicaid risk we faced in 2017 is something we are not going to face. There is not going to be a big bill to create per capita caps or block grants.”

On the other side, he added, the Democrats can offer challenges on oversight and tort issues.

“Now that they have taken control of the House and have a bigger voice in the Senate, we are going to face more oversight, and it is very possible in the next couple of years that there could be hearings, particularly on the House side, on issues like staffing, adverse outcomes, and any time there is a negative isolated case like the evacuation problem in Florida," he stated.

While hearings may make for concern on some level, Parkinson is confident that the skilled nursing sector can more than hold its own when it comes to educating lawmakers on the quality of care residents are receiving.

“We have a very good story to tell. Our data are compelling in showing the national improvements that have been made in quality," he said. “So, any time there is a hearing being held on an unreasonable topic, we will fight against that. In general, however, if there are hearings about how a nursing home is doing and we are given a chance to testify and the witness list is fair, we think we can do quite well and might be able to use it as a platform to explain the progress we have made.”
Parkinson says to improve quality in even a single nursing facility is hard, but to do so around the country as providers have achieved in recent years, it is even more remarkable.

"If you look at the data, and the numbers are the numbers, on a whole bunch of quality measures we improved across the country. But, we have gotten almost no credit for it," he said. "There are very few stories that ever say, this isolated thing happened in Florida, but you have to keep in mind that hundreds of thousands of people were safely sheltered in place and oh by the way the sector is getting better on return to home and patient satisfaction, etc. It is just not out there."

To get that story told in a more aggressive manner, Parkinson says AHCA/NCAL is increasing its efforts this year to build a so-called “army” of providers via a new social media initiative that can work to spread the positive news on quality issues.

Beyond the work advocating on issues and policies in Washington, D.C., he said with so many new members of Congress starting work, it is also important for providers to get these legislators into their buildings.

"There are a lot of stereotypes about what we do that go away when that happens," Parkinson stated. "They see the great care our members provide and also how old and frail our residents are, which deflates the myth that we have all of these people living in our buildings that could be living at home, which is just insane."

To read the article in Provider, click here.

**Assisted Living Gets a Break on EPA Hazardous Waste Pharmaceutical Rule**

Assisted living (AL) providers can breathe a sigh of relief now that the Environmental Protection Agency Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler has signed the agency's final rule regarding the disposal of hazardous waste pharmaceuticals, stated a recent article from McKnight's Senior Living.

The proposed rule, published in September 2015, called for the prohibition of long term care and other healthcare facilities from disposing down the toilet or drain those pharmaceuticals considered to be hazardous waste. It also defined how facilities should dispose of such drugs.

This posed quite an issue for assisted living providers, and for those who have an AL center as a part of their continuing care retirement communities, who were included in the definition of long term care facilities, because many AL residents often purchase and manage their own medications in their own units. Additionally, multiple pharmacies could be involved with residents at any given community.

In the past few years advocacy efforts had much to do with the changes made to the proposed rule before it was finalized, including comments submitted by Argentum and AHCA/NCAL.

Assisted living communities and CCRCs, the groups told the EPA in 2015, do not have the infrastructure nor the procedures in place to collect hazardous waste pharmaceuticals and would incur “significant expenses” to comply with the rule, without remuneration. Compliance would be complicated further by the fact that assisted living communities are regulated at the state level, and requirements vary from state to state, the organizations said at the time.

Though the final rule was originally expected to be issued in 2016, the EPA took comments on the proposed rule into consideration and to define long-term care facility in the final rule as CMS and the Drug Enforcement Agency do and consequently not include group homes, independent living communities, assisted living facilities, and the independent living and assisted living portions of CCRCs.

Following these changes, an NCAL spokeswoman said: “NCAL is pleased to see our comments with other key stakeholders were acknowledged and accepted by the EPA in regard to excluding assisted living communities from this rule. It only makes sense given that assisted living is regulated by the states, and residents are often the ones in charge of their medications. We support the agency’s recommendation that communities develop voluntary pharmaceutical collection programs as a best practice.”
It should be noted, however, that the EPA cautioned in the final rule, however, that assisted living communities still are responsible for the proper disposal of hazardous waste outside of residential areas. And some states may have more stringent requirements regarding assisted living communities and the disposal of hazardous waste in residential areas, the agency noted.

"[T]he agency recommends that assisted living facilities, group homes, independent living communities, and the independent and assisted living portions of continuing care retirement communities develop voluntary pharmaceutical collection programs for both hazardous and non-hazardous waste pharmaceuticals as a best management practice, as allowed by DEA regulations, to ensure proper management, avoid flushing, and minimize the potential for accidental poisonings, misuse or abuse," the EPA said. The agency recommends that residents of assisted living facilities follow the guidelines developed by the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Food and Drug Administration and the EPA for the disposal of unwanted household pharmaceuticals.

Click here to view the full article from McKnight’s Senior Living.

One Flu Vaccine Performing Better than the Rest, Study Says

Certain vaccine varieties are excelling over others in the senior population, tipping off providers ahead of the main flu season.

Cell-based vaccines have performed better than egg-based vaccines among Medicare beneficiaries. That’s according to U.S. Food and Drug Administration researchers, who conducted an analysis of more than 13 million seniors who received one of five formulations.

"The lessons we learn from these studies will help improve influenza vaccines and vaccine strategies so that we optimize the protection provided by seasonal influenza vaccines," epidemiologists from the CDC wrote in an accompanying editorial.

The formulations included Flucevax, egg-based quadrivalent, egg-based high-dose, adjuvanted and standard-dose vaccines. Flu-related emergency room visits were studied. The analysis — done in conjunction with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services — noted that cell-cultured vaccines’ effectiveness was upward of 11% higher than the standard-dose, egg-based version.

Results were published […] in the Journal of Infectious Diseases.

*This article was taken from McKnight’s Long Term Care News.*

Osteoarthritis: New Compound May Stop the Disease

Currently, there are at least 30 million adults in the US living with osteoarthritis, a progressive condition that affects the bones and cartilage within the joints. It occurs most often in the hands, hips and knees, but can also affect the body’s spine. This is the most prevalent form of arthritis and while there are a variety of ways that people can manage osteoarthritis, there is no cure at the present time.

New research published in the Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases, has shown that an innovative blocking agent can stop the degeneration of the cartilage when injected into the joints. Researchers created the treatment by first focusing on a molecule that had been found to cause inflammation, break down the cartilage and deplete the body of collagen and then developing a compound that blocks that molecule.

The team, led by Mohit Kapoor, Ph.D., arthritis research director at the University Health Network and senior scientist at the Krembil Research Institute, both in Toronto, Canada, recently discovered that a molecule called microRNA-181a-5p has a "critical" role in the destruction of the joints.

For this study, the team wanted to see if a blocking agent could counter this damaging molecule. They tested the therapeutic potential of so-called locked nucleic acid-antisense oligonucleotides (LNA-ASO)—more specifically a blocker
called "LNA-miR-181a-5p ASO"—in rats, rodents, cell cultures, and tissue samples from people with knee and spine osteoarthritis and found it to be effective.

"In this study," wrote the authors, "we provide the first evidence that intra-articular injection of in vivo grade LNA-miR-181a-5p ASO can attenuate cartilage degeneration in preclinical models of [facet joint] and knee [osteoarthritis]."

"The blocker we've tested is disease-modifying," explained the paper's first author, Dr. Akihiro Nakamura. "It has the ability to prevent further joint destruction in both knee and spine."

This finding is important, noted Kopoor, because currently there are no drugs or treatments available to stop osteoarthritis. There are medications to treat the symptoms, like pain, but none to stop the progression of the disease. The new technology being developed by Kopoor and his team is still new, but could be a game changer.

To find out more, click here to read the full article from Medical News Today.

**January 2019 Observances**

**January 25 is National Intravenous Nurse Day**: This observance was created to honor the nation’s intravenous (IV) nursing professionals who dedicate their lives to providing patients with the best infusion care. Visit [www.ins1.org](http://www.ins1.org) for more information.

**January is National Volunteer Blood Donor Month**: For more than 40 years, the American Red Cross has organized National Blood Donor Month in January as a tribute to regular blood donors, as well as a way to encourage others to donate. Visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) for more.

**AHCA/NCAL Information**

**National Quality Awards – Just One Week left to Apply!**
If you haven't submitted your application for the AHCA/NCAL National Quality Award Program, time is running out! **Applications must be submitted by January 31, 2019 at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time.**

*Late submissions are not accepted for any reason.* If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the AHCA/NCAL Quality Award team at qualityaward@ahca.org.

**AHCA/NCAL Quality Summit: Registration Open**
*AHCA/NCAL 2019 Quality Summit – Disrupt to Lead. Innovate to Succeed.* Calling all out-of-the box, visionary, and why not thinkers. Join other long term and post-acute quality practitioners in Tampa, FL, March 18-20, for the **AHCA/NCAL Quality Summit**. You can lend your voice to the conversation around what it takes to disrupt the status-quo in order to move forward with new ideas in patient-centered care and operational excellence (OR delivering solutions for quality care). **Online registration** is now open. The registration deadline is **March 5, 2019.**

**Registration Open for the 2019 Independent Owner (IO) Leadership Conference**
The AHCA/NCAL **Independent Owner (IO) Leadership Conference** is a unique opportunity for you and your peers. Taking place in beautiful Tampa, FL immediately following the Quality Summit, it’s a great way to learn something new and gain insights into some of your toughest challenges. **Register online** today. The registration deadline is **March 5, 2019.**

The IO Conference immediately follows the 2019 Quality Summit and takes place at the same location. **Register for both and save $50!**

**AL Cost Calculator**
The AL Cost Calculator is a web-based, enhanced resident assessment tool that assesses how costs are allocated across residents. Better understand the needs of your residents, so you can put the right staff with the right skills in the right place and at the right time. Multi-facility companies can see their company’s costs
across different buildings and over time. Learn more about the features and benefits.

The AL Cost Calculator will be available to NCAL member providers at no additional cost – it’s included with your membership.

IHCA Information

Expo Prospectus for the 2019 Convention & Expo is Now Available!
IHCA is already well into working on this year’s event. Interested in exhibiting at this year’s expo? Check out the prospectus (click here) for more information and to access the exhibitor contract. Contact IHCA’s Expo Manager Kelli Showalter at kshowalter@ihca.com.

69th Annual IHCA Convention & Expo – Call for Presentations Closing Soon!!
Interested in speaking at a session (or two) during the 69th Annual Convention & Expo? Time is running out to submit your presentations! The 2019 event, Peace, Love and Quality, will take place September 9-12, 2019 in Springfield, IL. The call for presentations will only be available through the end of January. Click here to submit your proposals online!

IHCA Has New Remittance Address for Dues
IHCA recently changed financial institutions. If you would like to send your dues payments to our lock box, please use the following address:

IHCA
PO Box 6248
Decatur, IL 62524-6248

IHCA Member Facility Annual Dues – Just a Few Weeks Left to Qualify for Discount!
Each year IHCA offers our member centers the option of paying annual dues in one lump sum rather than being invoiced for monthly payments. Annual Dues invoices have been distributed. Members who choose to pay annually will receive a 5 percent discount if their dues are paid by February 15, 2019.

LTC Today Magazine – Advertising Opportunities for 2019
Are you in the process of reviewing your marketing plan for 2019? The 2019 issues of the LTC Today magazine offer multiple opportunities to promote your company, product or service to long term care providers! Click here to view the 2019 Media Kit for more information. To purchase an ad online, click here.

If you have any questions or are interested in advertising, contact Tyler Gilboe at 800-572-0011 or email him at tyler@emconsultinginc.com.

Latest IHCA VCast
This week’s episode featured Ashley Snavely reminding providers of the February 1 deadline to use the new Physician Certification Statement form. VCast Online: Past VCast emails, with all of the appropriate links, are now available in the IHCA Resource Center. To access the resource center, simply log in to the member portal and click on Resources.

CE Certificates from IHCA Educational Events Available in CE Central
Attendees can now access their Continuing Education Certificates from the 68th Annual IHCA Convention & Expo through CE Central (click here). Additionally, certificates are also available for all of our past 2018 educational sessions, as well as the 2017 convention. To access CE Central, go to www.ihca.com/education and click on the CE Central link. Once there, simply enter your first and last name into the system to retrieve your information.

LTCNA Offering Core Competency Sessions!
LTCNA is now offering a la carte competency training sessions with their simulation mannequin, Geri Manikin! Get your nurses the training they need right in your center! The cost will be dependent on the amount of time spent in the center. Charter Memberships are also still available for centers. The fee for the membership is $2,000 and the center will receive 24 hours (4 6-hour days) of simulation time over the course of the year. For more information contact Debbie Jackson at djackson@ihca.com or 800-252-8988.
IHCA Member Spotlight

**Calling IHCA Members – We Want to Feature Your Company Here!!!**

Are you looking for a way to reach our members? Well, this is a great way to do just that! Our Member Spotlight gives our members a space to let us know what their company (or facility) is all about! (And to brag a little too if you want to!) Your Company Information could be seen here in a future issue!!

Has your company recently celebrated a milestone? Do you have positive stories or news to share? Would you just like to get your name out there among your fellow IHCA members?

Ready to sign up for a member spotlight?! Contact Ashley Caldwell! Email acaldwell@ihca.com or give her a call today!