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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:

- The **Virginia Neonatal Perinatal Collaborative (VNPC)** is offering two free webinar series focused on maternal and child health in 2024. One is centered on 2SLGBTQIA+ mental health and reproductive care. Webinars in that series are held every third Thursday of the month from 12-1 p.m. from January-May 2024. Register for that series [here](#). The other is the VNPC 2024 monthly webinar series held the third Tuesday of each month from 12-1 p.m. Webinars in this series focus on relevant topics in maternal and infant health in Virginia. Register [here](#).
- This month, VHHA hosted an installment of its quarterly public health webinar series for Virginia hospitals and health systems featuring updates provided by **Virginia Department of Health (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. View a recording of the Dec. 6 webinar and presentation slides [here](#) and [here](#). To this point, the webinar series has been hosted on the Go To Webinar platform. Future webinars scheduled for March 6 and June 5 will be hosted on Microsoft Teams. A registration link for those sessions will be e-mailed in January 2024 to all those currently registered for the webinar series. The current registration link can be accessed [here](#).
- The **Virginia Nurses Association (VNA)** has 15 grant-supported nursing scholarship opportunities available for participants in the 2024 Virginia Nurse Leadership Academy. The program, which is presented by the Virginia Nurses Foundation with scholarship support from VDH, is accepting 35 total fellows. This is the second year for the Academy, which has already graduated more than

30 accomplished fellows. Read more about the program and apply through this [link](#). The application deadline is Jan. 5.

- The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** (FDA) recently approved belzutifan (Welireg, Merck & Co., Inc.) for patients with advanced renal cell carcinoma (RCC) following a programmed death receptor-1 (PD-1) or programmed death-ligand 1 (PD-L1) inhibitor and a vascular endothelial growth factor tyrosine kinase inhibitor (VEGF-TKI). Read more [here](#).
- Registration is now open for the fourth annual Regional Human Trafficking Summit hosted by the **Regional Interdisciplinary Collaborative Working to Disrupt Human Trafficking** (RIC), a multi-state non-profit group that brings together academics, advocates, caregivers, clinicians, law enforcement, survivors, and other stakeholders who are working to end human trafficking. The theme of the Summit, which is scheduled for Feb. 7-8, 2024 at the **VCU School of Medicine**, is “Expanding Community Partnerships to Address Human Trafficking.” Registration is available through this [link](#) (the early bird rate ends Jan. 5, 2024) and information about sponsorship opportunities is available [here](#).
- The FDA recently approved two treatments, Casgevy and Lyfgenia, as the first cell-based gene therapies for the treatment of sickle cell disease (SCD) in patients 12 and older. Casgevy is also the first FDA-approved treatment to utilize a type of novel genome editing technology, signaling innovative advancement in the field of gene therapy. Sickle cell disease is a group of inherited blood disorders affecting approximately 100,000 people in the U.S. It is most common in African Americans and, while less prevalent, also affects Hispanic Americans. The primary problem in sickle cell disease is a mutation in hemoglobin, a protein found in red blood cells that delivers oxygen to the body’s tissues. This mutation causes red blood cells to develop a crescent or “sickle” shape. These sickled red blood cells restrict the flow in blood vessels and limit oxygen delivery to the body’s tissues, leading to severe pain and organ damage called vaso-occlusive events (VOEs) or vaso-occlusive crises (VOCs). The recurrence of these events or crises can lead to life-threatening disabilities or early death. Read more [here](#).
- The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) recently issued a [concept paper](#) that outlines its cybersecurity strategy for the health care sector. The concept paper builds on the [National Cybersecurity Strategy](#) that **U.S. President Joe Biden** previously released, focusing specifically on strengthening resilience for hospitals, patients, and communities threatened by cyber-attacks. The paper details four pillars for action, including publishing new voluntary health care-specific cybersecurity performance goals, working with Congress to develop supports and incentives for domestic hospitals to improve cybersecurity, and increasing accountability and coordination within the health care sector. According to the **HHS Office for Civil Rights** (OCR), cyber incidents in health care are on the rise. From 2018-2022, there has been a 93 percent increase in large breaches reported to OCR (369 to 712), with a 278 percent increase in large breaches involving ransomware. Cyber incidents affecting hospitals and health systems have led to extended care disruptions, patient diversions to other facilities, and delayed medical procedures, all putting patient safety at risk. Read more [here](#).
- The holiday season is a time to be thankful for our blessings. Here at VHHA, we are grateful for the dedicated caregivers and health care professionals who work in hospitals across Virginia to help keep people healthy. VHHA recently shared its 2023 video holiday card. The video is a lighthearted short featuring VHHA staff frolicking in an animated winter wonderland. It is our way of sharing a message of seasonal good cheer to members of the Virginia hospital community and so many other folks across Virginia. We wish everyone a safe, happy, and healthy holiday season and a prosperous New Year. View the 2023 video holiday card [here](#).

- 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 [Blue Virginia](#), the [Virginia Star](#), [WRIC](#), [WAVY](#), [WTVR](#), [WDBJ](#), [WFIR](#), [WXFR](#), [DC News Now](#), [River Country News](#), the [Henrico Citizen](#), the [John Fredericks Show](#), [Yahoo News](#), the [Culpeper Star Exponent](#), and the [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#).

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2. VHHA Launches ‘Control Your Care’ Campaign to Empower Patients in Making Health Care Decisions

State and federal policymakers, with support from the hospital community, have passed a series of laws protecting patients and families from surprise medical bills, promoting health insurance and hospital price transparency, and enabling people to get good faith price estimates prior to scheduled hospital procedures. Yet the vast majority of Virginians don’t know these consumer-friendly reforms exist to benefit them, according to [statewide polling](#) and focus group research conducted this year by the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA). To address that information gap, VHHA is launching the “[Control Your Care](#)” public awareness campaign to ensure patients and families know their rights to help them make informed medical decisions. The campaign includes a website, [ControlYourCare.com](#), with easy-to-understand information about consumer-focused health care reforms, links to state and federal laws regarding good faith price estimates, insurance and health care price transparency, surprise medical bills as well as descriptions of what the laws do, and other tools to serve the public. This campaign will be supported with statewide digital and broadcast advertising to help raise public awareness about the availability of these resources. Read more [here](#). – Julian Walker

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3. Governor Youngkin’s Budget Proposal Includes Funding for Behavioral Health, Workforce

Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin presented his vision for the Commonwealth’s next two-year budget during a joint address to the **General Assembly’s** money committees this week. Branded the “Unleashing Opportunity” budget proposal, this fiscal blueprint represents a singular opportunity for Governor Youngkin to imprint his priorities on how Virginia allocates its financial resources at the midway point of his gubernatorial term. This plan continues the Governor’s pursuit of tax reform and tax relief for Virginians by calling for a sweeping 12 percent income tax reduction, which would lower rates across Virginia tax brackets if enacted. The proposed offset for this would be a nearly 1 percent increase in the state sales and use tax as well as broadened application of the tax to apply to certain digital products such as software and streaming services that presently are not subject to the tax. Governor Youngkin also called for an end to Virginia’s car tax, which is levied by localities and collected as a local revenue source. Localities currently receive a \$950 million annual subsidy from the state as a form of consumer tax relief. The Governor indicated that an adjustment in local and state sales and use taxes could be a means to offset current car tax collections. On health care, the Governor’s budget includes a series of proposals to make continued investments into behavioral health care and health care workforce development. Several of these concepts reflected budget requests from VHHA, including:

- \$10 million in state fiscal year (SFY) 2025 for Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs or similar models.
- \$35 million over the biennium to expand and modernize the comprehensive crisis services system – including crisis receiving centers, crisis stabilization units, and enhancements to existing sites.

The budget proposal also includes \$9.5 million over the biennium to expand alternative transportation providers, \$10 million in SFY 2025 for one-time costs to establish additional mobile crisis services in underserved areas, and \$400,000 in SFY 2025 to establish a one-year demonstration project to implement testing for analyzing fentanyl and norfentanyl in wastewater in up to three geographically diverse localities. In terms of health care workforce funding, several provisions in the proposed budget reflect VHHA requests, including:

- \$8 million over the biennium to continue the Earn to Learn Nursing Education Acceleration program.
- \$10 million over the biennium for Virginia’s Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program.
- \$1.8 million over the biennium for nursing scholarships, loan repayment, and incentive programs based on priorities identified by the Commissioner of Health and the ability of the department to expedite funding to recipients.

The Governor’s budget proposal is the starting point for development of the biennial budget that covers a two-year period beginning July 1, 2024. Lawmakers in both chambers of the General Assembly will offer amendments to the budget during the scheduled 60-day legislative session that begins in January. Ultimately, the legislature will pass a compromise budget that reflects a modified version of Governor Youngkin’s proposal. The Governor will then have the opportunity to consider the package of amendments sent to him with the option to individually accept them, further modify them through amendment, or reject them by veto. Legislators then get a final chance to consider any changes from the Governor when they return to Richmond for a one-day “reconvened” session in April. Throughout this process, the VHHA Government Affairs team will remain diligently engaged with the Youngkin Administration and members of the General Assembly to advocate for policy and budgetary outcomes that support Virginia hospitals and health systems in their mission of serving patients and enhancing public health. – Julie Dime

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4. Registration Now Open for 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit in February

Registration is now open for the **2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit**, which will be held as a virtual event on Feb. 22, 2024 from 9:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m. Having an innovative mindset in health care is in high demand right now. Health care delivery innovation is necessary to find new ways to improve quality, enhance the patient experience, expand safety initiatives, increase efficiency, and reduce costs. As hospitals and health systems pursue innovative solutions in all aspects of their care delivery and quality and safety improvement efforts, they are making real strides toward what the industry refers to as “quadruple aim” – higher quality of patient care with improved and equitable outcomes, increased value for both the patient and provider, improved patient satisfaction and an improved care provider experience. The 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit will highlight the progress being made in that regard in Virginia and across the nation. Keynote speakers for the 2024 Summit include: **Dr. Aditi Mallick**, the Acting Director of the **CMS Office of Minority Health**, and **Bonnie Clipper**, DNP, MA, MBA, RN, CENP, FACHE, FAAN, an internationally recognized nurse futurist and nursing innovation expert. Registration for the 2024 Virginia Patient Safety Summit is free for staff and providers associated with Virginia hospitals and health systems, members of Virginia Patient Safety Summit partner organizations (Medical Society of Virginia, the Virginia Nurses Association, and the Virginia Pharmacists Association), federal and state health partner organizations and event sponsor organizations and students. Others may register for a fee of \$95. Visit this [link](#) for more details and event registration. To register, you may need to reset your password or create a new one (if you do not already have an

account). Contact events@vhha.com if you encounter trouble registering an account or creating a new password. – Abraham Segres and Kristie Burnette

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5. VHHA Cybersecurity Committee Holds Inaugural Meeting, Seeks Hospital Member Participants

This month, VHHA hosted the inaugural meeting of the **VHHA Cybersecurity Committee**, a group comprised of senior or executive level cybersecurity professionals at VHHA-member hospitals and health systems. Meetings will be held on a bimonthly basis and the focus of the Committee's work is on hospital-related cybersecurity concerns, best practices, procedures and protocols, and related issues. Member hospitals and health systems are welcome to nominate staff members to serve on the Committee. Please direct any questions to Ryan Lodata at rlodata@vhha.com. – Ryan Lodata

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6. VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features VHC Health Chief Nursing Officer

The latest episode of VHHA's *Patients Come First* podcast features an interview with **Melody Dickerson**, Senior Vice President of Hospital Operations and Chief Nursing Officer at **VHC Health** in Arlington, Virginia. She joins us for a conversation about her work, trauma care, workplace wellness, 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. – Julian Walker

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7. AHA to Host Rural Health Care Leadership Conference in February

Rural hospital leaders, along with leaders at health systems with rural health care services, are encouraged to attend the American Hospital Association (AHA) [Rural Health Care Leadership Conference](#) scheduled for Feb. 11-14, 2024, in Orlando, FL. The conference brings together leaders from across the country for peer-to-peer networking, as well as to offer strategies and resources that will help leaders tackle rural health challenges and learn about innovative approaches to transform care delivery and business practices. Learn more and register [here](#).

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8. Federal Agencies Issue Final Rule on Administrative Fees for Surprise Billing Dispute Resolution

HHS and the **U.S. Departments of Labor and Treasury** have issued a [final rule](#) that increases the administrative fee for disputes initiated under the *No Surprises Act* independent dispute resolution (IDR) process from \$50 to \$115 per party per dispute. The departments also finalized an increase to the fee range for certified IDR entities to \$200-\$840 for single determinations and \$268-\$1,173 for batched determinations. IDR entities will have discretion to increase the fee for batched disputes with more than 25 line items at a rate of \$75-\$250 per increment of 25 line items. The changes take effect for disputes

initiated on or after 30 days after publication of the final rule in the Federal Register, which is anticipated to occur within the next week. These fees will remain in effect until changed by subsequent notice-and-comment rulemaking. The rule was developed following a federal court decision earlier this year that vacated a nationwide a federal fee increase and batching rule for the IDR process for certain out-of-network providers and group health plans on the grounds that they violated the Administrative Procedures Act's notice-and-comment requirement. Read more [here](#). In related news, the independent dispute resolution portal for the *No Surprises Act* has been reopened to process all dispute types, including previously initiated batched disputes, new batched disputes, and new single disputes involving air ambulance services. Read more [here](#).

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9. VDH to Host Several Sessions on Mpox Training for Providers in Early 2024

The **Virginia Department of Health** (VDH) is hosting a series of educational training sessions for health care providers regarding updated information and lessons learned from the 2022-2023 Mpox outbreak. The sessions will highlight the epidemiology of the outbreak and the risk of reemergence, prevention and control strategies, and vaccination and communication strategies. Four sessions are scheduled, and each will be held from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on the following dates and locations: Fairfax VDOT on Jan. 23, Double Tree Hotel Charlottesville on Jan. 31, Wytheville Community College on Feb. 8, and the Hyatt Place Chesapeake on Feb. 14. Information about continuing education credit available to participants can be viewed online [here](#). Registration is required through this [link](#).

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10. Around the State

Wythe County Community Hospital recently recognized several members of its team, including **Dr. William Hood**, gastroenterologist, who was named Physician of the Year; **Mark Smith**, PA, who received the Advanced Practice Provider award; **Jennifer Ramey**, BSN, RN, who received the Excellence in Nursing award; and **Carla Eanes**, MBA, who received the Employee of the Year award.

Dr. Fady Tawadros, a medical oncologist, has been named **Clinch Valley Health's** Medical Provider of the Year. Read more [here](#).

Jason Lineen, Chief Strategy Officer at **UVA Health**, and **Megan Perry**, Senior Corporate Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer at **Sentara Health**, have been named to the *Becker Hospital Review's* 65 health system chief strategy officers to know [list](#). – Salinna Lor

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