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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:

- This week, [VHHA Solutions](#) and its endorsed partner, [AblePay Health](#), presented a webinar on "Patients as Payors – Addressing the Patient Affordability Gap." In the current health care financial landscape, providers need options to improve revenue and patient satisfaction, while patients desire a more affordable and better billing experience. There is a way to achieve each of these goals. The webinar discussed the patient affordability gap faced by health care providers in Virginia and the communities they serve, ways to increase provider revenue while delivering a better overall patient experience, and a case study with the Lehigh Valley Health Network that demonstrates how patient payment behavior can be positively changed.
- VHHA held a meeting of its **Healthcare Safety & Security Workgroup**, which consists of health system security and operational leaders. The purpose of the group is to share knowledge and best practices to help promote the use of safety and security practices in hospitals focused on staff and visitor safety and security and violence prevention in health care settings.
- The **Virginia Department of Health (VDH)** and **State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Shelton** recently provided an update on an increase in meningococcal disease activity as part of the response to the ongoing [statewide outbreak](#) caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroup Y. VDH reports that cases from a separate strain of ciprofloxacin and penicillin-resistant *N. meningitidis* serogroup Y continue to be detected in Northern Virginia, impacting local post-exposure prophylaxis recommendations in this region. Meningococcal disease is a rare, but serious illness caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*. The two most common types of meningococcal infections are infections of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (called meningitis), and

bloodstream infections (septicemia). Both infection types are very serious and can be deadly in a matter of hours. Health care providers are advised to remain vigilant regarding the possibility of additional cases. Read more [here](#).

- The **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** recently issued proposed rules regarding Medicare inpatient prospective payment system (IPPS) rates and long-term care hospital (LTCH) standard payment rates for fiscal year (FY) 2025. The IPPS [proposed rule](#) would increase Medicare rates by a net 2.6 percent in FY 2025 (compared to FY 2024) for hospitals that are meaningful users of electronic health records and submit quality measure data. The 2.6 percent payment update reflects a hospital market basket increase of 3 percent as well as a productivity cut of 0.4 percent. It would increase hospital payments by \$2.9 billion, plus a proposed \$560 million increase in disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments, and a proposed \$94 million increase in new medical technology payments. The LTCH [proposed rule](#) would increase long-term care hospital standard rate payments by 1.2 percent in FY 2025 relative to FY 2024. That includes a 3.2 percent market basket update, reduced by a 0.4 percent productivity adjustment. CMS also proposes to raise the fixed-loss amount for high-cost outlier payments to \$90,921, which would reduce overall standard rate payments by 1.3 percent. And CMS proposes to rebase the LTCH market basket using a 2022 base year.
- The [VHHA Foundation](#) recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. The Virginia Hospital Research and Education Foundation was founded in 1964 for “improvement of the health of the people of Virginia through the provision of better hospital care, the fostering and sponsorship of educational programs for training of health career personnel, financial aid for individuals of Virginia needing assistance who are pursuing an education in health careers, the promotion of scientific knowledge in hospital administration, promotion and sponsorship of research in hospital administration.” Today, the VHHA Foundation proudly carries on that legacy in the Commonwealth by working with hospital members and stakeholders to improve the health of all Virginians through collaboration, research, and education.
- Virginia health care professionals looking to gain quality and patient safety improvement knowledge are invited to engage with the **VHHA Center for Healthcare Excellence** to access **IHI Open School** courses and earn a certificate in quality and safety. The IHI Open School offers access to online courses created by world-renowned faculty in improvement capability, patient safety, triple aim for populations, person- and family-centered care, and leadership. Health care professionals who may find this opportunity beneficial include physicians, nurses, allied health professionals, hospital managers, quality, safety, risk management, patient experience and population health staff, and leaders in a Virginia hospital. Join us and collaborate across professions and health systems to improve how health professionals in Virginia work together to deliver better care. The program registration fee is \$199. Please send any questions to Kristie Burnette at kburnette@vhha.com.
- CMS recently [finalized](#) proposed changes to Medicare Advantage (MA) plan capitation rates and Part C and Part D payment policies for calendar year (CY) 2025. The agency estimates the changes will increase MA plan revenues by an average of 3.7 percent from 2024 to 2025. The update includes changes to the Part C risk adjustment model that were finalized in the CY 2024 final rule and are being phased-in over three years, such as transitioning the model to reflect ICD-10 condition categories and using more recent data available for fee-for-service diagnoses and expenditures, in addition to providing technical updates to the methodology for CY 2025. Also finalized are technical updates to the Part C and D star ratings and changes to the standard Part D drug benefit required by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, including capping annual out-of-pocket costs for people with Medicare Part D at \$2,000 in 2025. CMS also reminds

stakeholders to consider submitting comments to the Medicare Advantage Data [Request for Information](#) by the May 29 deadline.

- The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) has [interim guidance](#) for clinicians on recommendations for preventing exposure to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) viruses, including infection prevention and control measures, testing, antiviral treatment, patient investigations, and monitoring of exposed persons. The guidance has been updated recently in the wake a positive test for bird flu documented in the U.S.
- The **Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency** (CISA), a division of the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (DHS), recently issued a [proposed rule](#) implementing cyber incident and ransom payment reporting requirements under the Cyber Incident Reporting for Critical Infrastructure Act of 2022, that is intended to help the agency prevent cyberattacks and deploy assistance to victims. In addition to specifying instances in which a cyber incident or ransomware attack would need to be reported to CISA, the draft regulations would require critical infrastructure organizations, including critical access hospitals and hospitals with 100 or more beds, to report a covered cyber incident to the federal government within 72 hours, report ransom payments within 24 hours, and a requirement to preserve certain data and records for two years. These draft regulations will likely be in addition to, rather than in lieu of, any regulations promulgated by the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) that are expected to place additional cybersecurity requirements on healthcare providers and payors, among others. CISA will accept comments on the rule for 60 days following publication in the Federal Register on April 4.
- Through May 28, the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology is seeking comment on a [federal strategic plan](#) for health information technology over the next five years. The plan outlines federal goals and strategies to support electronic health information access, exchange, and use. Federal agencies will use the final plan to prioritize and coordinate their efforts and signal priorities to the private sector.
- The **Advanced Research Projects Agency** (ARPA-H) of the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) has issued a [draft solicitation](#) seeking applicants to the Health Care Rewards to Achieve Improved Outcomes (HEROES) program that will evaluate a new payment model to incentivize community-based interventions to improve health outcomes in a geographic area. Under the current timeline, abstracts from interested applicants are due by June 17. The model will offer participating non-profit organizations, consortiums, and others direct payments to reduce specific health harms in an area. Questions may be sent to heroes@arpa-h.gov.
- Through May 20, appropriate state agencies can apply for up to \$2 million per year to partner with communities to integrate primary and behavioral health care in clinical practices and up to \$900,000 annually to implement a primary care model that integrates mental health and substance use conditions. These funding opportunities are available through the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** (SAMHSA). Read more [here](#) and [here](#). Another grant opportunity open to local governments and mental health systems is offering as much as \$750,000 annually to implement assisted outpatient treatment programs to support adults with serious mental illness. The application deadline for that program is April 26. Read more [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 the [Gazette Leader](#), [Axios](#), the [Virginia Star](#), [WAVY](#), [Yahoo News](#), and the [Henrico Citizen](#).

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2. VHHA Elects New Board of Directors Officers for 2024-2025

During its annual Spring Meeting this week, VHHA elected the 2024-2025 slate of officers to its **Board of Directors**. The Board, comprised of hospital and health system leaders from across the Commonwealth, unanimously elected **VCU Health** Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer **Michael Elliott** as Chair, **Valley Health System** President and CEO **Mark Nantz** as Vice Chair, and **HCA Healthcare Capital Division** President **Dr. William Lunn** as Secretary-Treasurer. Elliott is the first African American Board Chair for the Association. Other Board of Directors officers include **Ballad Health** Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President **Eric Deaton** as the Immediate Past Chair, and VHHA President and CEO **Sean T. Connaughton**. VHHA Board officers are elected to 12-month terms. In addition to the Board officers, VHHA's Executive Committee includes **Riverside Health System** CEO **Dr. Mike Dacey**, **Sentara Leigh Hospital** President **Joanne Inman**, and **Mary Washington Healthcare** President and CEO **Dr. Mike McDermott**. Read more [here](#).

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3. Virginia General Assembly Returns to Richmond for Reconvened Session on Budget, Legislation

State lawmakers from around the Commonwealth were in Richmond this week (April 17) for the annual **Virginia General Assembly** reconvened session to consider [242 amendments](#) to the current state budget and the next biennial budget as well as [153 legislative vetoes](#) sent down by **Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin**. The Governor and the legislature have been split on funding approaches regarding education support, taxation policy, public safety, and health and human resources, among other items. During the reconvened session, state lawmakers rejected all of the Governor's budget amendments. In response, the Governor is expected to veto the budget legislation. That would leave Virginia without a budget to serve as a state government spending blueprint for the two-year period beginning July 1, 2024. Accordingly, a legislative special session to develop a new two-year state budget is expected to be held on May 13. The **VHHA Government Affairs Team** is actively monitoring these events and engaging with the Youngkin Administration and legislative leaders to advocate for the interests of hospitals and health systems throughout the process. – Julie Dime

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4. Virginia Hospital Nurses Share Patient, Visitor Behavior Expectations in Public Education Campaign

In a new [public service announcement](#), Virginia nurses from hospitals across the Commonwealth urge people to behave respectfully during visits to health care facilities so clinicians can stay focused on providing patient care. That message is at the heart of the ongoing "Help Us, Help You" public awareness and education campaign from VHHA, which draws attention to the heightened risk of workplace violence faced by health care professionals. Workplace violence is a serious challenge in health care settings. The latest videos feature hospital nurses explaining why directing verbal abuse towards clinical staff doing their jobs is inappropriate because it can cause distractions that impede their ability to care for patients. The same is true of physically assaulting or threatening to harm clinical staff providing care. Such conduct is illegal in Virginia and may carry serious criminal penalties. Nurses featured in the videos offer advice on proper conduct in health care settings – telling viewers not to

bring weapons into a hospital and to refrain from verbal outbursts and improper physical contact with staff in clinical environments – and share strategies for patients and visitors to appropriately address concerns by asking questions and sharing feedback in a respectful manner. A [30-second version](#) of the new public service announcement has been shared with television and radio stations across the state and will be promoted on digital channels. This current effort follows a previous public awareness campaign on this subject featuring a series of videos VHHA released in [June 2023](#) highlighting the raw, emotional stories of hospital nurses from [Central Virginia](#), [Northern Virginia](#), and [Southwest Virginia](#) about their firsthand experience with workplace violence in clinical settings. Read more [here](#). – Julian Walker

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5. Register for the 2024 Virginia Behavioral Health Summit, May 16 in Richmond

Register for the **2024 Virginia Behavioral Health Summit** scheduled for May 16 in Richmond. The theme of the one-day event is “Connection: Building a Behavioral Health System that Serves All” and its purpose is to expand knowledge about behavioral health treatment and access for clinicians, healthcare administrators, policymakers, and community-based providers. The Summit will feature innovative behavioral health models, patient-centered strategies, an overview of the expansion of the crisis system across the state, and the opportunity to learn about advances in technology that can improve behavioral health resources. Visit this [link](#) to register and reserve lodging accommodations. View the Summit agenda [here](#).

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6. VHHA *Patients Come First* Podcast Features Mary Washington Healthcare Sous Chef, Artist

The latest episode of VHHA’s *Patients Come First* podcast features an interview with **Delante Monroe**, a sous chef at **Mary Washington Healthcare**. He joins us for a conversation about the role of culinary professionals in hospital settings, his award-winning painting skills, his interest in information technology, the power of positivity, 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](#), [TuneIn](#), [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, 105.1 FM and 1050 AM in Lynchburg, and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. on 93.9 FM in Richmond. Send questions, comments, feedback, or guest suggestions to pcfpodcast@vhha.com. – Will Selden

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7. Register for the Virginia Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Summit, April 24 in Richmond

Time is running short to [register](#) for the **2024 Virginia Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Summit**, which is scheduled for April 24 at The Westin – Richmond and hosted by VHHA. The theme for this year’s Summit is “Human Caused Incidents” and it will feature speakers, panelists, sponsors, and support organizations focused on how the Virginia health care community can strengthen its preparedness for such situations. Participants can earn up to 5.75 **ACHE Qualifying Education Hours** toward initial certification or recertification of the **Fellow of the American College of Healthcare**

Executives (FACHE) designation. Up to 6.0 hours of **EMT Continuing Education** (CE) credits are also being offered to qualified participants. Visit this [link](#) for more information and contact Isaac Rife at irife@vhha.com to learn about sponsorship opportunities. The \$75 event registration ticket includes in-person attendance to the Summit, continental breakfast, and lunch. VHHA extends its thanks to the generous sponsors whose support helps keep the ticket price low to promote access and inclusion. – Matt Allen

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8. VHHA to Host May 29 In-Person Workshop on Identifying and Retaining Devoted Employees

VHHA is hosting an in-person workshop on May 29 (10 a.m.-2 p.m.) at its offices in Glen Allen, VA that will be facilitated by **Joe Mull**, a featured keynote speaker at the [2024 Virginia Healthcare Workforce Summit](#). The theme of the workshop is “Becoming a Destination Workplace: What Leaders Must Do to Find and Keep Devoted Employees.” Registration cost is \$50, which includes lunch and all meeting materials. Capacity is limited for this event. Register [here](#) to secure a spot. Questions may be directed to events@vhha.com. – Sharon Alexander

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9. Register for “State of Bio” Networking Event on April 25 in Northern Virginia

[Register](#) to attend the upcoming “State of Bio” event on April 25 (5-7 p.m.) at **Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center**. This free event is hosted by the **Northern Virginia BioHub** with support from the following sponsors: the **Virginia Coordinated Clinical Research Network (VCCRN)**, **Sentara Health**, the **George Mason University Institute for Biohealth Innovation**, and the **Prince William County Department of Economic Development**. The event will include a panel discussion highlighting innovation needs in health care, new discoveries advancing science and medicine, and the importance of research and health care partnerships. Participants will also have networking opportunities with health care professionals, life science industry partners, and academic researchers. – Lara D’Antonio

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10. Around the State

Congratulations to **Carilion Clinic** CEO **Nancy Howell Agee** on receiving the “Distinguished Service Award” from the **American Hospital Association (AHA)**. The award recognizes lifetime achievement in providing national leadership in health care delivery and service. Agee, a nurse by training, has been a highly effective hospital leader during her career and has previously served as Chair of the **VHHA Board of Directors** and Chair of the **AHA Board of Trustees**.

Dr. Octavia Reed Wynn, Associate Chief Nursing Officer at **Bon Secours Southside Medical Center**, has been recognized in the Sisterhood Spotlight series from **Virginia First Lady Suzanne Youngkin**. See more [here](#).

Dr. David Lee, Medical Director of Philanthropy for the **VHC Health Foundation**, and **Roberta Tinch**, MHA, FACHE, President of **Inova Mount Vernon Hospital** and Vice President and Administrator for **Inova Musculoskeletal Services**, have been named recipients of the 2024 Diversity in Business Awards by the *Washington Business Journal*. See more [here](#). – Salinna Lor

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