The Sacramento Bee: Shifting Population in California Nursing Homes Creates ‘Dangerous Mix’
Where once skilled nursing facilities were universally thought of as “rest homes” for the frail and elderly, a growing proportion of California nursing home residents are younger, more able-bodied patients, many diagnosed with mental illness. Some residents, like Cargill, enter facilities with long-standing drug and alcohol problems. Others, like Thompson, have histories of homelessness. Still others are newly released from prison. Facilities have been able to tap these clients’ Medicare and Medi-Cal benefits and, in many instances, provide long-term housing at government expense. “The homes that we have known as havens for the frail elderly, as you can see, are no longer safe havens,” said Tippy Irwin, executive director of San Mateo County’s ombudsman services. Instead, she said, many facilities now have what she described as a “dangerous mix” – old, young, mentally ill, convicted felons, street people in desperate need of care, and younger clients with chronic illnesses, brain injuries and drug abuse problems. (Lundstrom and Reese, 4/2)

California Healthline: Denti-Cal is Blasted by Oversight Commission
The program, Denti-Cal, “ranks among state government’s greatest deficiencies,” said the report by the Little Hoover Commission, a statutorily independent oversight agency. The program falls “disastrously short in providing dental care to a third of California’s population and more than half of its children.” A more vivid description comes from Pedro Nava, the commission’s chairman: “In California we have kids’ teeth rotting out of their heads,” he told CHL. “That’s utterly inexcusable.” (Gorn, 4/1)

CAMPAIGN 2016

The Washington Post: Donald Trump Took 5 Different Positions on Abortion in 3 Days
You can see the exact moment last week that Donald Trump made up his mind on whether women would face criminal punishment once he signed new restrictions into law. He is at a town hall with MSNBC’s Chris Matthews, and, after Matthews badgers him for a while, he finally answers the question. “The answer is … that,” Trump says, eyes looking to the side in thought, “there has to be some form of punishment.” He punctuates “has” with a hand gesture. Done. Final. But as it turns out…that was not, in fact, Trump’s final position on the subject. (Bump, 4/3)

The Columbus Dispatch: Kasich Touts Anti-Abortion Views While Criticizing Trump
Republican presidential candidate John Kasich defended abortion restrictions he has signed as governor even as he rejected a call last week by Donald Trump to legally punish women who have had abortions. In an interview Sunday on ABC’s This Week, Kasich said he “has been very careful about making sure that we don’t pass something that’s going to cause a constitutional conflict,” even though critics charge those laws have been a factor that led to the closing of half the clinics in Ohio. (Torry, 4/3)

The Associated Press: Clinton, Sanders Had Opposing Views on Biomedical Research
Democratic presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders were on opposing sides of certain types of biomedical research while they served in Congress, differences that have gained notice by scientists and advocates on the forefront of stem cell research. Clinton has pointed to her advocacy for groundbreaking medical research…. Sanders, a Vermont senator, has supported stem cell research in the Senate. But advocates within the scientific community cite his voting record in the early 2000s in the House when he repeatedly supported a ban on all forms of human cloning. (4/2)
PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

NPR: Kids' Grades Can Suffer When Mom or Dad are Depressed
When parents suffer depression, there can be a ripple effect on children. Kids may become anxious, even sad. There may be behavior problems. Health may suffer. Recently, a large Swedish study showed that grades may decline, too, when a parent is depressed. Using data from 1984 to 1994, researchers from Drexel University, measured school grades for more than 1.1 million children in Sweden and compared them with their parents’ mental health status. (Neighmond, 4/4)

The Orlando Sentinel: UCF Medical School Boosts Opioid Rx Education
UCF College of Medicine is one of more than 60 medical schools in the nation to sign a pledge to require its medical students to take some form of education about prescribing pain medications like oxycodone, fentanyl and hydrocodone in order to graduate. The signing of the pledge comes as the Obama administration increases its efforts to curb the prescription pain medication abuse and heroin epidemic that's affecting many corners of the nation, including Central Florida. (Miller, 4/1)

MARKETPLACE

Statins like Lipitor and its generics have revolutionized cardiovascular care for nearly two decades as an effective, inexpensive way to reduce LDL cholesterol, the so-called bad cholesterol in the bloodstream. Not everyone can take them, though; a significant number of people complain of muscle pain, weakness and cramping so severe that they discontinue the therapy even at the risk of a heart attack or stroke. Their resistance to the medication has been controversial, because in most cases there are no biomarkers for the muscle problems individuals describe. (Bernstein, 4/3)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Bloomberg: Doctors Can Do More to Fight Addiction
President Barack Obama can convene all the task forces, panel discussions and summit meetings he wants, and they may actually be useful. But a lasting solution to America's opioid epidemic depends mostly on a meaningful change in physicians' attitudes about treating addiction. (3/31)

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CALIFORNIA WATCH

California Healthline: Opioid Epidemic Spurs Rethink on Medication and Addiction
Drug treatment providers in California and elsewhere have relied for decades on abstinence and therapy to treat addicts. In recent years, they've turned to medication. Faced with a worsening opiate epidemic and rising numbers of overdose deaths, policymakers are ramping up medication-assisted treatment. (Gorman, 4/5)

Reuters: Narcotic Fentanyl Linked to At Least 10 California Overdose Deaths
At least 42 drug overdoses in the past two weeks have been reported in northern California, 10 of them fatal, in what authorities on Monday called the biggest cluster of poisonings linked to the powerful synthetic narcotic fentanyl ever to hit the U.S. West Coast. The rash of overdoses, which Sacramento County public health authorities began to report on March 24, have been centered in and around the California capital. Nine of the fatal cases were reported there, with the tenth occurring in neighboring Yolo County. (Gorman, 4/4)

Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) were developed to give society’s most vulnerable kids a chance at health care. But there’s a catch: In many states, parents must sign their kids up for the programs to receive coverage. And to sign their kids up, parents must know that their kids are eligible in the first place. A new study published in the International Journal for Equity in Health found a distressing information gap among parents of uninsured Latino and African American kids. (Blakemore, 4/4)

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

The top watchdogs in the House demanded to know Tuesday why a personal laptop taken from a federal building in Washington state was used to conduct child-support audits, especially because it and other stolen hard drives may have contained millions of names and Social Security numbers. The letter by the House government oversight panel’s Republican chairman and senior Democrat to Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell comes about a week after GOP investigators began looking into the breach in Olympia, Washington, which authorities say affected as many as five million people. …The break-ins occurred in early February at the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. (4/5)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Kaiser Health News: IRS Could Help Find Many Uninsured People, but Doesn’t
Nearly a third of people without health insurance, about 10 million, live in families that received a federal earned income tax credit (EITC) in 2014, according to a new study. But the Internal Revenue Service doesn’t tell those tax filers that their low and moderate incomes likely mean their households qualify for Medicaid or subsidies to buy coverage on the insurance exchanges. That’s a lost opportunity to identify people who are eligible but not receiving government assistance to gain health coverage, the researchers say. (Galewitz, 4/5)
PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Man-made global warming is making America sicker, and it's only going to get worse, according to a new federal government report. The 332-page report issued Monday by the Obama administration said global warming will make the air dirtier, water more contaminated and food more tainted. It warned of diseases, such as those spread by ticks and mosquitoes, longer allergy seasons, and thousands of heat wave deaths. (Borenstein, 4/5)

The Associated Press: Hawaii Researchers Focus on Data to Combat Zika Virus
As the Zika outbreak takes hold in Latin America, researchers thousands of miles away in Hawaii are using data to figure out where it might spread next. In the last three months, researchers from the University of Hawaii at the Pacific Disaster Center have focused on combating the mosquito-spread virus. So far, the Maui-based center has worked to map the spread of Zika, which can help health officials and local governments figure out where to target mosquito eradication efforts or increase access to health services. (Starleaf Riker, 4/5)

MARKETPLACE

Kaiser Health News: By Not Discussing Cost Issues, Doctors, Patients May Miss Chances to Lower Out-of-Pocket Expenses
Talking about money is never easy. But when doctors are reluctant to talk about medical costs, a patient's health can be undermined. A study published in Monday's Health Affairs explores the dynamics that can trigger that scenario. Patients are increasingly responsible for shouldering more of their own health costs. In theory, that's supposed to make them sharper consumers and empower them to trim unnecessary health spending. But previous work has shown it often leads them to skimp on both valuable preventive care and superfluous services alike. (Luthra, 4/4)

STAT: Treasury's New Rules on Tax Inversions Raise Questions about Pfizer-Allergan Deal
After months of anticipation, the US Department of Treasury issued new rules about so-called tax inversions that raised uncertainty about the $160 billion merger deal between Pfizer and Allergan. The rules are designed to curb inversions, which effectively reduce federal revenue and, as a result, have been widely criticized as unpatriotic and detrimental. In these deals, a US company buys a foreign company and reincorporates headquarters overseas where corporate taxes are lower. The acquiring company can reduce taxes by adding debt to its US unit and shifting profits overseas. (Silverman, 4/4)

The Associated Press: Gilead Paying Up to $1.2B for Nimbus Unit, Drug Candidate
Biologic drugmaker Gilead Sciences Inc. said Monday that it will buy a subsidiary of Nimbus Therapeutics LLC and its experimental pill for an increasingly common metabolic disorder that causes life-threatening fat buildup in the liver. Gilead, based in Foster City, California, will pay $400 million for Nimbus Apollo Inc. Parent company Nimbus Therapeutics, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, could receive another $800 million if Nimbus Apollo's drug development program meets certain milestones in testing results and medicine approval and sales. (Johnson, 4/4)
Reuters: Makers Took Big Price Increases on Widely Used U.S. Drugs
Major drug companies took hefty price increases in the U.S., in some cases more than doubling listed charges, for widely used medications over the past five years, a Reuters analysis of proprietary data found. Prices for four of the nation's top 10 drugs increased more than 100 percent since 2011, Reuters found. Six others went up more than 50 percent. Together, the price increases on drugs for arthritis, high cholesterol, asthma and other common problems added billions in costs for consumers, employers and government health programs. (Humer, 4/4)

HEALTH IT

Kaiser Health News: Patients’ Assessment of Their Health is Gaining Importance in Treatment
For Erin Moore, keeping her son’s cystic fibrosis in check requires careful monitoring to prevent the thick, sticky mucous his body produces from further damaging his lungs and digestive system. Moore keeps tabs on 6-year-old Drew’s weight, appetite, exercise and stools every day to see if they stray from his healthy baseline. When he develops a cough, she tracks that, too. It’s been nearly a year since Drew has been hospitalized; as a baby he was admitted up to four times annually. Erin Moore credits her careful monitoring, aided by an online data tracking tool from a program at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center called the Orchestra Project, with helping to keep him healthy. (Andrews, 4/5)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Los Angeles Times: Forget Cops. Should Doctors and Teachers Wear Body Cameras?
Consider health care, another interaction which produces potentially life-or-death outcomes. In general, African Americans and other people of color receive inferior medical treatment, leading to higher death rates. David R. Williams, a professor of public health at Harvard, who has researched this issue writes that blacks and other minorities receive fewer diagnostic tests, fewer treatments, and overall poorer-quality care — even after adjusting for variations in insurance, facilities, and seriousness of illness. Leaving aside patient outcomes, there are also highly credible accusations that medical staff have groped and sexually abused sedated patients. Body cameras on doctors and nurses might well prevent such incidents, or provide evidence if they did occur. (Steven Strauss, 4/4)
The Sacramento Bee: California Senate Panel Backs Stiffer Sentencing for Fentanyl
With Sacramento’s fentanyl-related overdoses at center stage, a state Senate committee unanimously approved the first step in stiffening penalties for major drug traffickers in California who sell large amounts of the potentially lethal painkiller. (Buck, 4/5)

Los Angeles Times: State Attorney General Seizes Videos behind Planned Parenthood Sting
Daleiden characterized Tuesday’s search as “an attack on citizen journalism.” “This is no surprise -- Planned Parenthood’s bought-and-paid-for AG has steadfastly refused to enforce the laws against the baby body parts traffickers in our state, or even investigate them,” he said. A spokeswoman for the attorney general said the office cannot comment on the ongoing case. A federal judge has rejected Daleiden’s journalistic claims, noting that the activist and his team used fraudulent tactics, including false identities, and selectively edited the material they captured on tiny cameras disguised as shirt buttons and hidden in water bottles, despite state laws prohibiting secret recording. (St. John, 4/5)

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

The Associated Press: White House to Transfer Ebola Funds to Combat Zika Virus
Congressional officials say the Obama administration is about to announce it will transfer leftover money from the largely successful fight against Ebola to combat the growing threat of the Zika virus. The officials say roughly 75 percent of the $600 million or so would be devoted to the Centers for Disease Control. The agency focuses on research and development of anti-Zika vaccines, treating those infected with the virus and combating the mosquitoes that spread it. (Taylor, 4/6)

Los Angeles Times: Despite Bipartisan Support, Mental Health Reform Bill Could Be Derailed
Mental health advocates are pressing Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill not to abandon a push to modernize the nation’s ailing mental health system amid rising partisan tensions over President Obama’s Supreme Court pick. The effort has picked up crucial bipartisan support in the Senate and galvanized dozens of groups representing patients, physicians and state and local leaders. The Obama administration has also backed calls for reform, proposing more than $500 million in new federal spending to expand mental health services nationwide. But election-year politics and uncertainty over funding are fueling concerns that years of collaborative work… may not bear fruit. (Levey, 4/6)

CAMPAIGN 2016

The Washington Post: Ted Cruz Declares Wisconsin ‘A Turning Point’ in the GOP Campaign
Ted Cruz rolled to a landslide victory Tuesday in Wisconsin’s hotly contested Republican presidential primary, capitalizing on a difficult stretch for Donald Trump to cut into the front-runner’s overall delegate lead and deliver a psychological blow to the billionaire mogul. … In the closing days of the Wisconsin race, Trump borrowed in to try to close a polling deficit with Cruz. … Trump also deployed his wife, Melania, to make a rare campaign appearance Monday night in Milwaukee — a move seemingly orchestrated to soften his image with women after a series of misstatements on abortion policy. But it was not enough. (Sullivan and Rucker, 4/5)
PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

KPCC: Can Social Media Help You Quit Smoking?
You use Facebook to stay in touch with old friends from high school. You use Instagram to share pictures of your breakfast. But can you use Twitter to quit smoking? Researchers from several California universities developed a Twitter-based smoking cessation program called Tweet2Quit and then tested it. They found that people who participated in the Twitter program were twice as likely to have abstained from smoking two months after quitting, compared with people who just used nicotine patches and visited the federal government’s website designed to help people quit smoking. (Plevin, 4/6)

The Washington Post: The Graying of HIV: 1 in 6 New U.S. Cases are People Older than 50
Thousands of people 50 and older are diagnosed with HIV each year in the United States, a development that has significant consequences for the health care and social support they need and the doctors, counselors and others who provide it. Older people tend to be sicker when the infection is finally discovered. They usually have other health conditions that accompany aging and often are too embarrassed to reveal their illness to family and friends. (Bernstein, 4/6)

The Associated Press: California Lawmaker Wants to Allow Supervised Heroin Use
A lawmaker wants to allow California addicts to use heroin, crack and other drugs at supervised facilities to cut down on overdoses, joining several U.S. cities considering establishing the nation’s first legal drug-injection sites. The proposal introduced Tuesday comes as San Francisco, Seattle, New York City and Ithaca, New York, weigh ordinances to set up the facilities, citing the success of a site operating in Canada since 2003. (Noon, 4/5)

MARKETPLACE

STAT: Insulin Prices Have Skyrocketed, Putting Drug Makers on the Defensive
Here’s a sticking point for diabetics: the cost of insulin more than tripled — from $231 to $736 a year per patient — between 2002 and 2013, according to a new analysis. The increase reflected rising prices for a milliliter of insulin, which climbed 197 percent from $4.34 per to $12.92 during the same period. Meanwhile, the amount of money spent by each patient on other diabetes medications fell 16 percent, to $502 from $600. (Silverman, 4/5)

The Washington Post: Obama Criticizes Companies that Leave U.S. for Lower Taxes
President Obama made a forceful case Tuesday for stopping corporations from moving their headquarters overseas to avoid U.S. taxes, saying they are taking advantage of the American economic system and saddling the middle class with the bill. These companies “effectively renounce their citizenship,” Obama said at a White House news briefing. (Merle, 4/5)

The Associated Press: FDA Approves 1st Cheaper Version of J&J’s Top Drug Remicade
Federal health officials have approved a cheaper version of Johnson & Johnson’s blockbuster drug, Remicade, a pricey biotech medicine for inflammatory diseases. The approval of Inflectra Tuesday is only the second time that the Food and Drug Administration has approved a quasi-generic biotech drug for the U.S. market. These so-called biosimilar drugs, already available in Europe, have the potential to generate billions of dollars in savings for insurers, doctors and patients in coming years. (Perrone, 4/5)
HEALTH IT

The Washington Post: What Yelp Can Tell You About a Hospital that Official Ratings Can’t
If you’ve ever taken the time to give Yelp your two cents about a hospital, you'll be happy to know that someone's listening and that they've deemed the crowdsourced information not only useful — but unique. In what is believed to be the first large-scale analysis of such data, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania looked at 17,000 Yelp reviews of 1,352 hospitals from consumers. They found that the online information provides a broader sense of a facility than the current gold standard — a U.S. government survey that costs millions of dollars to develop and implement each year. (Cha, 4/5)

The Sacramento Bee: California Hospital Hacks Reveal Weak Links in Health Cybersecurity
Cybercriminals have targeted hospitals with growing frequency in recent years, identifying the millions of recently digitized patient files as a treasure trove of unguarded information. Hospitals have historically been vulnerable to security breaches due to their reliance on expensive, aging medical equipment, their inability to halt patient care to perform time-consuming software updates, and a workflow that depends on the constant input and accessing of data on different devices. Those complications, combined with the high black market value of medical records, makes such facilities prime targets for a growing number of sophisticated criminals. (Caiola, 4/5)

QUALITY

Los Angeles Times: Does a White Doctor Understand a Black Patient’s Pain?
A new study reveals that in a group of 222 white medical students, half judged as possibly, probably or definitely true at least one of 11 false beliefs about racial differences. And that is not without potential consequences for the patients these medical students may one day treat, the new research suggests. (Healy, 4/4)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

STAT: Why Every Clinical Trial Should Have an App for Participants
Using predictive algorithms that prioritize consumer preferences, these companies are finding inventive new ways to engage customers with games, stories, and sharing tools sent to their mobile devices. Pharmaceutical companies should be doing the same thing. But many of them aren’t, or aren’t doing it well. (Glen de Vries, 4/5)

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Certain news organizations are protected via a paywall requiring the purchase of a subscription to view their content.
California Healthline: This Family Says No to Medi-Cal, but a Computer Won’t Listen
For many people, it’s a relief to finally qualify for Medi-Cal. But Christopher Bundros can’t seem to get his two kids off of it. The Clovis accountant and his wife qualify for federally subsidized health coverage through Covered California, the state’s insurance exchange. He wants his two children on the same plan so they can see the doctors they want. The problem is that his kids are eligible for Medi-Cal, the state’s low-income insurance program, which has a higher family income cutoff for children than for adults. Thus, according to federal law, they cannot be enrolled in any other subsidized insurance plan. (Gorn, 4/7)

Kaiser Health News: Major Employers Decry Sutter Health’s Tactics in Dispute Over Prices
Sutter Health, long accused of abusing its market power in California, is squaring off against major U.S. employers in a closely watched legal fight over health care competition and high prices. The latest fight has erupted over Sutter’s demand that employers sign an arbitration agreement to resolve disputes. Without it, Sutter says employers must pay sharply higher rates — 95 percent of its full charges — for out-of-network care at its hospitals, surgery centers and clinics. (Terhune, 4/7)

The Associated Press: California Hospitals Give $8.5 Million to Tax-Hike Measure
A lobbying group for California hospitals is giving $8.5 million to an initiative campaign to extend a temporary tax increase on the wealthy. The political arm of the California Association of Hospitals and Health Systems reported the March 23rd donation on Wednesday. (4/6)

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

Reuters: Tax Rules That Killed Allergan-Pfizer Deal May Be Hard to Challenge
U.S. tax rules are more difficult to sue over than other regulations that emanate from Washington, presenting a challenge to anyone considering a lawsuit over an Obama administration plan to discourage deals known as inversions, tax lawyers say. Business trade groups have frequently gone to court since President Barack Obama took office to try to block rules about the environment, health or labor unions, but taxes are different because of a law that generally bars suits until a tax is assessed. (Ingram, 4/6)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Stateline: Why are So Few Kids Getting the HPV Vaccine?
Ten years after the federal government approved the first vaccines to combat the cancer-causing human papillomavirus, nine years after those vaccines were recommended for all adolescent girls, and five years after they were recommended for all adolescent boys, less than half of girls and only a fifth of boys are getting immunized. (Ollove, 4/7)

The Associated Press: Addiction Epidemic Fuels Runaway Demand for ‘Sober Homes’
The nation’s epidemic of addiction to painkillers and heroin is fueling runaway demand for a once-obscure form of housing known as "sober homes," where recovering addicts live together in a supervised, substance-free setting to ease their transition back to independence. The facilities are rarely run by credentialed professionals and are only lightly regulated — a situation that has prompted at least five states to pass or consider legislation to impose basic rules on how they operate. Some homes have been accused of tolerating drug use and participating in insurance fraud. (4/6)
MARKETPLACE

Boston Globe/ProPublica: New England Journal of Medicine Increasingly Targeted by Critics

The New England Journal of Medicine is arguably the best-known and most venerated medical journal in the world. Studies featured in its pages are cited more often, on average, than those of any of its peers. And the careers of young researchers can take off if their work is deemed worthy of appearing in it. But following a series of well-publicized feuds with prominent medical researchers and former editors of the journal, some are questioning whether the publication is slipping in relevancy and reputation. The journal and its top editor, critics say, have resisted correcting errors and lag behind others in an industrywide push for more openness in research. (Ornstein, 4/5)

HEALTH IT

Kaiser Health News: Hospital Software Often Doesn’t Flag Unsafe Drug Prescriptions, Report Finds

Medical errors are estimated to be the third-highest cause of death in the country. Experts and patient safety advocates are trying to change that. But at least one of the tools that’s been considered a fix isn’t yet working as well as it should. That’s according to the Leapfrog Group, a nonprofit organization known for rating hospitals on patient safety. Leapfrog conducted a voluntary survey of almost 1,800 hospitals to determine how many use computerized-physician-order-entry systems to make sure patients are prescribed and receive the correct drugs, and that medications won’t cause harm. The takeaway? While a vast majority of hospitals surveyed had some kind of computer-based medication system in place, the systems still fall short in catching possible problems. (Luthra, 4/7)


MedStar Health Inc. said Wednesday that hackers who seriously disrupted its operations and held some data hostage did not exploit software vulnerabilities that were the subjects of warnings in 2007 and 2010 to break into its corporate network. The hospital chain released a new statement after The Associated Press reported Tuesday that hackers broke into a corporate computer server exploiting flaws that had persisted for years on the network. The AP's report was attributed to a person familiar with the investigation who was not authorized to discuss the findings publicly. MedStar said the new information came from Symantec Corp., which it hired to investigate. (Abdollah, 4/6)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

The New York Times: Finger-Pointing Abounds in Failed Pfizer Deal

Pfizer’s abandoned deal leaves all sides tainted. The United States Treasury looks bad for changing the rules on Monday to kill the $152 billion merger with Allergan. Lawmakers’ inaction encouraged such tax-driven transactions. But Pfizer and its chief executive, Ian C. Read, bear the most responsibility for wasting time and resources pushing an overpriced, risky deal. (Robert Cyran, 4/6)

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Certain news organizations are protected via a paywall requiring the purchase of a subscription to view their content.
California Healthline: Covered California Imposes New Quality, Cost Conditions on Plans
Moving into a realm usually reserved for health care regulators, Covered California Thursday unveiled sweeping reforms to its contracts with insurers, seeking to improve the quality of care, curb its cost and increase transparency for consumers. Among the biggest changes: Health plans will be required to dock hospitals at least 6 percent of their payments if they do not meet certain quality standards, or give them bonuses of an equal amount if they exceed the standards. (Ibarra and Gorn, 4/8)

Los Angeles Times: Kamala Harris' Support for Planned Parenthood Draws Fire after Raid on Anti-Abortion Activist
California Atty. Gen. Kamala Harris is drawing fire from supporters of an anti-abortion activist whose undercover videos and identity cards were seized by the state Department of Justice this week after Harris' political campaign sought to drum up support for Planned Parenthood. Harris seeks the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Barbara Boxer. Her campaign website includes a page that asked supporters to sign a petition "to defend Planned Parenthood." (St. John, 4/7)

CAMPAIGN 2016

The New York Times: Donald Trump’s Health Care Ideas Bewilder Republican Experts
Donald J. Trump calls for “a full repeal of Obamacare” but says that “everybody’s got to be covered.” Initially, he liked “the mandate,” a central feature of the Affordable Care Act that requires most Americans to have insurance or pay a penalty, but he backed off that position under fire from conservatives. He would allow individuals to take tax deductions for insurance premium payments. But aides acknowledge that this tax break would not be worth much to people whose income is so low they pay little or nothing in federal income taxes. For them, Trump aides say, there would be Medicaid, which the billionaire businessman says he would not cut but would turn into a block grant to state governments. This whipsaw of ideas is exasperating Republican experts on health care. (Pear and Haberman, 4/8)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Sacramento Bee: Undocumented Could Be Allowed to Buy Covered California Health Policy
In a move called both symbolic and practical, the Covered California board took the first step Thursday toward allowing undocumented residents to purchase health plans – with no state or federal subsidies – through California’s Obamacare marketplace. The board can’t officially enact that change, which requires state legislation and federal permission, but Covered California officials indicated they were ready to lend support if California lawmakers ask them to. (Buck, 4/7)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The Washington Post: House to Vote on Bills to Combat Opioid Abuse
House Republican leaders plan to hold a vote next month on legislation tackling heroin and painkiller abuse, a key issue to many members whose districts have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) announced the plan on Thursday, saying the vote will occur after committees working on the issue complete their work in the next few weeks. (Demirjian, 4/7)
HEALTH IT

Los Angeles Times: Criminal Hackers Now Target Hospitals, Police Stations and Schools
Three weeks ago, a debilitating digital virus spread quickly in computer networks at three Southern California hospitals owned by Prime Healthcare Services. Using a pop-up window, hackers demanded about $17,000 in the hard-to-trace cyber currency called Bitcoin to destroy the virus they had implanted. The virus had encrypted medical and other data so it was impossible to access. … The attempted extortion by criminal hackers was the latest case of what the FBI says is a fast-growing threat to vulnerable individuals, companies and low-profile critical infrastructure, from hospitals and schools to police stations. (Hennigan and Bennett, 4/8)

The Associated Press: Security Flaws Found in 3 State Health Insurance Websites
Federal investigators found significant cybersecurity weaknesses in the health insurance websites of California, Kentucky and Vermont that could enable hackers to get their hands on sensitive personal information about hundreds of thousands of people, The Associated Press has learned. And some of those flaws have yet to be fixed. The vulnerabilities were discovered by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, and shared with state officials last September. (4/7)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Los Angeles Times: Pfizer Shows That Its Allergan Merger was Only a Tax Dodge
When it announced its record-setting $160-billion merger with Allergan, the maker of Botox, last November, the giant drug company Pfizer tried valiantly to pretend that the deal wasn't mostly about cutting its tax bill. “We are doing this because of the strategic importance of the franchises, the revenue growth we believe we can get within the U.S. and internationally, and the importance to combine the research approaches,” Pfizer CEO Ian Read told investment analysts on Nov. 23, after the merger was announced. He also said, a bit lamely: “I want to stress that we are not doing this transaction simply as a tax transaction.” (Michael Hiltzik, 4/6)

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