California Healthline: FDA Faults 12 Hospitals for Failing to Disclose Injuries, Deaths Linked to Medical Devices
Federal regulators said 12 U.S. hospitals, including well-known medical centers in Los Angeles, Boston and New York, failed to promptly report patient deaths or injuries linked to medical devices. The Food and Drug Administration publicly disclosed the violations in inspection reports this week amid growing scrutiny of its ability to identify device-related dangers and protect patients from harm. (Terhune, 10/28)

The San Jose Mercury News: Obamacare: Key Moves by Covered California Helped Keep Premiums Down
The nation’s ever-controversial health care law suffered a black eye last week after the federal government announced that next year’s premiums for those who depend on the Affordable Care Act would increase by an average of 22 percent. But the blow won’t be as painful for most of the 1.4 million Californians who get their health coverage through Covered California, the state’s health insurance exchange: The average 2017 premium increase will be 13.2 percent after two years of modest increases. (Seipel, 10/30)

CAMPAIGN 2016

Modern Healthcare: Healthcare Leaders Send Cash to Hillary Clinton, Shun Donald Trump
Healthcare leaders apparently don’t think much of Donald Trump. A quarter of 100 prominent healthcare executives gave money to Trump’s opponent, Democrat Hillary Clinton. The rest have not donated to either Clinton or Trump, according to a Modern Healthcare analysis of federal election records. Not a single one financially backed Trump, even though many of them have a history of donating to conservative politicians and causes. (Herman and Muchmore, 10/29)

Sacramento Business Journal: Soda Taxes on the 2016 Ballot Could Eventually Save Millions in Healthcare Costs
The soda taxes popping up on ballots in cities across the U.S. could lead to a major drop in sugary beverage consumption and millions of dollars in healthcare savings. Soda tax initiatives under consideration in California would result in a 20 percent drop in soda consumption, according to a new study out Thursday from Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health. The resulting reduction in obesity and diabetes would slash healthcare costs in the San Francisco Bay Area by $54.9 million over 10 years, the study’s authors said. (Hall, 10/28)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Kaiser Health News: Insurers, Hospitals Clash over Help Paying Obamacare Premiums
Having health insurance is vital for 21-year-old Mercedes Nimmer, who takes several expensive prescription drugs to manage multiple sclerosis. So Nimmer was thrilled to get health insurance last year through the Affordable Care Act’s marketplace and qualify for a federal subsidy to substantially lower her cost. Yet, the government assistance still left her with a $33 monthly premium, a hefty amount for Nimmer, who makes $11,000 a year as a part-time supply clerk. (Galewitz, 10/31)
The New York Times: As Health Premiums Jump, Obama Wields an Imperfect Shield
Urging people to sign up for coverage under the Affordable Care Act, President Obama said last week that while premiums might be rising, most consumers need not worry. “Premiums going up,” he said, “don’t necessarily translate into higher premiums for people who are getting tax credits.” ... But left unmentioned in the pitch to consumers are what economists and health policy experts describe as possible reasons to be concerned about rising premiums. (Pear, 10/30)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Los Angeles Times: Can Too Much Halloween Candy Kill You? This is How Much it Would Take
If you’ve inhaled so many “fun size” Halloween candies that you feel like you could die, scientists have some good news: That is extremely unlikely. Of all the ways to go, overdosing on candy might not seem so bad. But death by candy is actually pretty hard to pull off. (Kaplan, 10/31)

Kaiser Health News: Presidential ‘Parity’ Panel Offers Steps to Treat Mental Illness Like Other Disease
Acknowledging that “there is more work to be done” to ensure that patients with mental illness and addiction do not face discrimination in their health care, a presidential task force made a series of recommendations Friday including $9.3 million in funding to improve enforcement of the federal parity law. The long-awaited report is the product of a task force President Barack Obama announced in March during a speech about the opioid epidemic. (Gold, 10/31)

Stat: How the Food Industry Shapes America’s Diet
But whether the trade group should be hawking it at an assembly of the nation’s dietitians — as it did here at a conference this month — has become a point of contention. The event in question is the annual Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo, and it is a veritable feast of food-related promotion. But the event is also made possible by vast sums of money from companies and trade groups, in some cases reinforcing the perception that “Big Food” brands are corrupting the guidance provided to millions of Americans every year. Over the years, the group hosting the event, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, has exacerbated those concerns. (Kaplan, 10/31)

Reuters: Kids Believe E-Cigs Less Dangerous than Cigarettes
A majority of U.S. middle and high schoolers say that e-cigarettes are less harmful than traditional cigarettes and that such products as smokeless tobacco and cigars fall somewhere in between, according to national surveys. They’re not necessarily wrong, but that comes with caveats, experts say. (10/28)

The Washington Post: New Data Shows a Deadly Measles Complication is More Common than Thought
A complication of measles that kills children years after they have been infected is more common than previously thought, according to disturbing data released Friday. ... The complication is a neurological disorder that can lie dormant for years and then is 100 percent fatal. Researchers don’t know what causes the virus to reactivate, and there is no cure once it does. The only way to prevent the disorder is by vaccinating everyone possible against measles. (Sun, 10/28)
PHARMACEUTICALS

Stat: New Cholesterol Drugs Aren’t Selling, and That’s Worrying Biotech
A year ago, two new drugs that used a novel mechanism to drive down cholesterol levels came on the market, and were promptly crowned as blockbusters in waiting. Analysts estimated sales at more than $3 billion a year. But the two drugs have been commercial flops, in part due to a complicated reimbursement system that has frustrated doctors, confused patients, and left the biotech industry worried about the implications for other high-priced drugs in the pipeline. (Garde, 10/28)

HEALTH IT

McClatchy: U.S. Healthcare Sector Vulnerable to Cybersecurity Attack
The U.S. health care industry has been hit with 22 major computer breaches since mid-2015 that have resulted in the loss of millions of patient records, says SecurityScorecard, a New York City firm that offers cybersecurity ratings and monitoring. Nearly two-thirds of the 27 largest hospitals in the United States are slow to install security patches to overcome cyber vulnerabilities, the company said in a report released Thursday. It was only one of two surveys released this week on the health care system and cybercrime. A second report, released by Intel Security’s McAfee Labs unit, underscored that stolen medical records are less valuable than stolen records from banks – but still valuable. (Johnson, 10/28)

QUALITY

Modern Healthcare: When Physicians Burn Out, Solutions are Elusive
Healthcare systems, practices and medical schools are deploying an array of tactics to help physicians cope with the unique stress of modern medicine. Some programs offer regular moments of reflection, connection with other doctors or other sources of catharsis. (Whitman, 10/29)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

The Washington Post: Is the DEA Partly to Blame for the Opioid Epidemic?
Destructive and persistent, the epidemic of opioid addiction is also deeply ironic: Unlike previous drug scourges in U.S. history, this one spread via perfectly legal channels. Millions of people were introduced to addictive pain-killing medications by doctors’ prescriptions, filled at pharmacies, ultimately supplied by pharmaceutical manufacturers. All of this went on in one of the most heavily regulated sectors of the U.S. economy — health care — which is supervised by a veritable army of officials working for dozens of agencies, state and federal. (10/30)
CALIFORNIA WATCH

California Healthline: Blue Shield again Owes Californians Millions in Health Care Rebates
Blue Shield of California, already under scrutiny from the Department of Managed Health Care, is on the hook for almost $25 million this year to enrollees and the employers that cover them and their dependents. A rule in the Affordable Care Act requires insurance companies to pay customers back when the insurers don’t spend enough money on medical care. (Bartolone, 11/1)

Sacramento Bee: Covered California Executive Director Peter Lee Talks about Obamacare, Millennials and Premium Increases
Starting Tuesday, Nov. 1, through Jan. 31, Californians who don’t have employer-based health insurance or Medicare can sign up for health insurance through the state’s marketplace, Covered California. That’s the easy news. As Covered California launches its fourth annual sign-up season under the federal Affordable Care Act, health care coverage is as contentious as ever, both in presidential debates and in national headlines. Covered California has already posted average premium increases of 13.2 percent, compared with a nationwide average of 25 percent. (Buck, 10/31)

CAMPAIGN 2016

Los Angeles Times: The Tobacco Tax Campaign Has Reached $100 Million. But This Time Something’s Different
Never before have tobacco companies spent so much trying to defeat a cigarette tax hike in California. The $71 million raised by opponents of this year’s Proposition 56, which would add a $2 per pack tax on cigarettes, to date tops the industry’s totals in 2006 and 2012, when R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris successfully knocked down previous tobacco tax hikes at the ballot. But unlike those previous failed campaigns, proponents of this tobacco tax hike have done a lot more to match the industry’s dollars. (Dillon, 11/1)

MARKETPLACE

The New York Times: Is High-Deductible Health Insurance Worth the Risk?
As companies push workers to pay more for their medical care, millions of employees are facing a tough decision, choosing between high premiums and high deductibles. The choice is this: Pay more every month for peace of mind later, or pay less and run the risk of having higher out-of-pocket costs down the line. (Abelson, 10/31)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Kaiser Health News: Premature Births Rise Slightly, First Uptick in 8 Years, March of Dimes Reports
The number of preterm births in the United States rose in 2015 for the first time in eight years, according to data presented Tuesday by the March of Dimes. The organization also reported that racial minorities continue to experience early labor at higher rates. Preterm births increased from 9.57 to 9.63 percent in 2015, which represents an additional 2,000 babies born prematurely in the U.S., the report found. (Heredia Rodriguez, 11/1)
The New York Times: Americans Blame Obesity on Willpower, Despite Evidence it’s Genetic
Americans believe that obesity is the biggest health threat in the nation today — bigger even than cancer. But though scientific research shows that diet and exercise are insufficient solutions, a large majority say fat people should be able to summon the willpower to lose weight on their own. (Kolata, 11/1)

California Healthline: Study: ‘Ubiquitous’ Nature of Painkillers Lands Kids — Even Toddlers — in the ER
As the nation continues to confront an epidemic of opioid and prescription painkiller addiction and overdoses, its victims seem to flood emergency rooms. But a study out Monday highlights a surprising group of patients suffering from opioid poisoning at rates that have also marked a dramatic increase: adolescents, children and even toddlers. (Shefali Luthra, 10/31)

The New York Times: A New Death Toll for Smoking
A new study has found that 28.6 percent of all cancer deaths in the United States are attributable to cigarette smoking. Researchers calculated the number using the relative risks for 12 smoking-related cancers, including acute myeloid leukemia, mouth cancers, and those of the esophagus, stomach and colon. (Bakalar, 10/31)

Stat: In Mouse Study, Zika Damages Cells in Testes, Impedes Fertility
The Zika virus attacks cells in mouse testes crucial for sperm and sex hormone generation and hampers reproduction, according to new research that raises the possibility that the virus could affect fertility in men. There are major caveats to the research, which was published Monday in the journal Nature. The study was conducted in mice, and many findings from mouse studies do not hold up in people. The researchers also used a very powerful dose of Zika when infecting the mice. (Joseph, 10/31)

Stat: Raising ‘Good’ Cholesterol Doesn't Reduce Heart Attack Risk
“Good” cholesterol might be in for a name change. Raising HDL, widely known as good cholesterol, for years has been thought to protect against heart attack and stroke. But a big new study published Monday found little evidence it does. The finding upends the advice doctors have been giving millions of patients — and helps explain why the drug industry has failed time and again, despite billions in investment, to develop a drug that cuts deaths from heart disease by boosting HDL levels. (Garde, 10/31)

Los Angeles Times: Does the Soda Industry Manipulate Research on Sugary Drinks’ Health Effects?
One hundred percent. That is the probability that a published study that finds no link between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and poorer metabolic health was underwritten by the makers of sugar-sweetened beverages, or authored by researchers with financial ties to that industry. Compare that figure with 2.9%. Among published studies that found that sugary beverage consumption is linked to higher rates of obesity and diabetes, fewer than 3% were underwritten by the sugar-sweetened beverage industry or authored by researchers who receive money from them. (Healy, 10/31)

Reuters: Cancer Survivors Take More Psych Meds than Other People
People who live through a bout with cancer are more likely than others to use drugs for anxiety and depression, a study suggests. About 19 percent of adult cancer survivors take drugs for depression, anxiety or both, compared with roughly 10 percent of other adults, the study found. (10/31)
PHARMACEUTICALS

The New York Times: Also-Ran to EpiPen Reaches for a Closing Window of Opportunity
As the list price of a pair of EpiPen devices soared to more than $600 this summer, people scurried to find alternatives, occasionally throwing caution to the wind. Some bought cheap syringes filled with epinephrine, the medication in EpiPens; others made homemade auto-injectors, following the steps in a popular YouTube video. Few people, though, have turned to the one true alternative — known by the brand name Adrenaclick. (Thomas, 11/1)

WOMEN’S HEALTH

Los Angeles Times: Women in California Can Legally Get Birth Control Without a Prescription. But for Many, it’s a Struggle
For many women in California, a new law that was supposed to make getting birth control easier has been a little disappointing. Under the law, women should be able to go to a pharmacy without a doctor’s prescription and pick up hormonal contraception, including pills and patches. Although the legislation was passed in 2013, women still struggle to find pharmacists who will dole out the medicines. (Karlamangla, 10/31)

Orange County Register: More Women Decide that Babies Can Wait, Census Finds
Teenage pregnancy and birthrates continue to fall. And as female millennials outpace their male peers in education – and the cost of housing soars – growing numbers are prioritizing their careers and personal happiness over having children and starting families. New census data show overall birthrates are continuing to decline, as women increasingly delay pregnancy until their mid-30s or later. (Leung, 10/31)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Sacramento Bee: Where You Live Matters More than Obamacare to Your Health
The recent announcement that insurance premiums will be going up for people who buy their health coverage through Obamacare has put the program back in the news, with Republicans from Donald Trump on down calling for its repeal and Democrats saying its problems can be easily fixed. But the issue that neither side ever wants to talk about is that the Affordable Care Act, whether it survives or not, will have little effect on the health of most Americans. (Daniel Weintraub, 10/31)

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Ventura County Star: Covered California Prices, Subsidies Rise
Open enrollment in Covered California began Tuesday, and premiums are expected to rise an average of nearly 16 percent in Ventura. But subsidies paid by the federal government are climbing, too. Age and income are wild cards that affect prices. The twisted math could bring a roller-coaster ride of numbers for many of the 67,000 people in Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties covered through the health insurance marketplace created by the Affordable Care Act. (Kisken, 11/1)

Doctors, hospitals and health care advocacy groups are hoping two November ballot measures will do what they've been unable to do at the state Capitol: Bring more money to California's health care program for the poor. The industry groups have tried for years to get more state funding for Medi-Cal. They argue that as Medi-Cal's population grows under the ACA, there simply aren't enough doctors willing to treat patients because the state's payment rates are too low. But they've run into a roadblock. (Adler, 11/1)

Los Angeles Times: Anthem is Cutting Out-of-Network Health Coverage in a 'Bait and Switch,' Lawsuit Says
On the first day of Obamacare open enrollment, a consumer group sued Anthem Blue Cross for attempting to automatically renew policies that no longer cover out-of-network costs for hundreds of thousands of Californians. A lawyer for Consumer Watchdog said Tuesday that Anthem was "railroading existing members into bare-bones plans". (Petersen, 11/1)

Ventura County Star: Ventura County CEO Powers Gets 5-year Contract Extension
County Executive Officer Mike Powers was awarded a new contract Tuesday in a unanimous vote of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. Powers, 53, of Ventura, who has served as the top administrator of the county government since 2011, will be CEO until November 2021 under terms of the contract. (11/1)

CAMPAIGN 2016

California Healthline: Maverick AIDS Activist to Porn Police? The Man behind California’s Proposition 60
The man behind Proposition 60 is Michael Weinstein, president of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, and a long-time maverick in gay activist circles. The nonprofit runs pharmacies and provides HIV care in 13 states and 37 countries, and gave away 38.5 million condoms last year. It's putting $4.5 million from its pharmacy sales into backing the Proposition 60 condom mandate. (It also put $14.7 million behind Proposition 61, Weinstein’s initiative aimed at lowering drug prices.) (Dembosky, 11/2)

The Washington Post: Trump: If Obamacare is not Repealed, it ‘Will Destroy Health Care in America’
Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump vowed on Tuesday to summon Congress into a special session to end and replace the Affordable Care Act, as he portrayed the repeal of the contentious health-care law as a prime reason for voters to elect him. Trump went slightly beyond his previous promise to try to end the ACA, widely known as Obamacare, on the first day of a Trump administration. But his call for a special session puzzled many, as the current Congress is scheduled to reconvene after the election, and the new one will gavel in January, before Inauguration Day. (Goldstein and Johnson, 11/1)
Politico: Bill Clinton Spars with Heckler over Obamacare
Bill Clinton on Tuesday tangled with a heckler at a Florida rally who threw back at the former president the remarks he made in October that Obamacare was the “craziest thing in the world.” Clinton, who has at times gotten heated on the campaign trail, especially bristled at the suggestion that he would support repealing President Barack Obama’s signature health care law. (Griffiths, 11/1)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Kaiser Health News: Healthy Customers, and Those with Major Medical Needs, May Want Bronze Plans
The open enrollment period for coverage through the health insurance marketplaces starts today, and readers have plenty of questions about what to buy. [KHN consumer columnist Michelle Andrews] addresses a few of them this week. (Andrews, 11/2)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Los Angeles Times: To Fight Childhood Obesity, Task Force Recommends Screening All Kids Starting at Age 6
The fight against childhood obesity should begin in doctors’ offices with routine weight screening for all kids ages 6 and up, according to fresh advice from health experts. Draft guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force urge pediatricians and other clinicians to check the body mass index of children and adolescents to identify patients who would benefit from weight counseling programs. (Kaplan, 11/1)

Stateline: Why More Grandparents are Raising Children
The number of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren is going up and increasingly it’s because their own kids are addicted to heroin or prescription drugs, or have died from an overdose. In 2005, 2.5 million children were living with grandparents who were responsible for their care. By 2015, that number had risen to 2.9 million. Addiction, especially to opioids, is behind much of the rise. (Wiltz, 11/2)

The Fiscal Times: Smoked Or Swallowed, These Legal Drugs Are Killing Kids
For years, in the face of troubling statistics over poverty and hunger, gun violence, child abuse and exposure to lead and other toxic chemicals in the environment, the U.S. has grappled with the problem of children’s health. Public health officials and physicians have just added two more serious childhood dangers to the mix: the nationwide epidemic of opioid abuse and the surge in the availability and use of marijuana. (Pianin, 11/1)

PHARMACEUTICALS

Bloomberg: Investors are Hooked on Flipping Pharmaceuticals
Dealmakers have always flipped companies. Lately, they’ve been flipping something else: aging pharmaceuticals. Take Actimmune, developed by Genentech Inc. decades ago. By 2012, sales were fizzling. Then rights to the immune-disorder treatment were acquired by a company backed by private equity. The price climbed, 434 percent in two years, and Actimmune was a hot property. Horizon Pharma Plc snapped it up. (Langreth, 11/2)
Reuters: Senator Grassley Asks Defense Department to Explain EpiPen Spending
U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley asked the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs on Tuesday to explain spending trends for the EpiPen emergency allergy treatment. The request followed a recent report by Reuters detailing how EpiPen price hikes by manufacturer Mylan NV had added millions to U.S. Department of Defense spending since 2008 as the agency covered more prescriptions for the lifesaving allergy shot at near retail prices. (Beasley, 11/1)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

If there is a coherent theme to this year's election, it is the growing economic frustration of working Americans. While trade has been the chief scapegoat, a major culprit has received much less attention: the rising cost of health insurance. (Regina E. Herzlinger, Barak D. Richman and Richard J. Boxer, 11/2)
California Healthline: New Data: Surprising Number of California Parents Experienced Abuse as Children
One out of five California adults with children living in their homes were beaten, kicked or physically abused when they were children, and one in ten were sexually abused, according to data released recently by a children’s health foundation. Experts believe that’s an undercount. (Wiener, 11/3)

Sacramento Bee: California Health Department Lays Out New Plan to Fight HIV
The California Department of Public Health rolled out a hefty HIV plan Wednesday with the aim of stopping new cases of the chronic illness statewide. The plan is a collaboration between the department and local health jurisdictions, including the Sacramento County Department of Public Health. “Getting to zero,” according to the plan, means reaching zero new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths along with no stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. About 5,000 new HIV diagnoses are made in the state each year. By 2021, the department hopes to reduce the number of new cases to fewer than 2,500 a year. (Caiola, 11/2)

CAMPAIGN 2016

Politico: Lawmakers Who Cross Aisle on Abortion Face Ouster
Republicans who support abortion rights are already an endangered species. But they’re likely to become nearly extinct next year in a political winnowing that is knocking off moderates on both sides — and turning the politics of abortion even more rancorous. Five Republicans in Congress regularly buck their party by supporting abortion rights. But one of those, Rep. Richard Hanna of New York, is retiring and two more — Rep. Bob Dold and Sen. Mark Kirk, both of Illinois — face uphill races. And the same narrowing is happening on the other side: No more than seven Democrats in Congress regularly vote against abortion rights. (Haberkorn, 11/3)

The Hill: Ryan Embraces Trump’s Call for Special Session to Repeal ObamaCare
Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) on Wednesday embraced Donald Trump’s call for a special session of Congress to repeal ObamaCare. Ryan, who has at times had a tense relationship with Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, also said repeal of ObamaCare is a reason why Trump should be president. … Ryan said Republicans would use a process called reconciliation, which would allow a repeal measure to get through the Senate with just a simple majority, rather than the usual 60. (Sullivan, 11/2)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Associated Press: CDC: Progress Reducing Uninsured Rate Threatens to Stall
President Barack Obama’s legacy health care law has reduced the number of Americans going without health insurance to historically low levels, but continued progress threatens to stall this year, according to a new government report. The study released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests the law may be reaching a limit to its effectiveness in a nation politically divided over the government’s role in guaranteeing coverage. (Alonso-Zaldivar, 11/3)
Reuters: Anthem Says it May Trim Obamacare Participation in 2018
U.S. health insurer Anthem Inc on Wednesday raised the prospect of smaller participation in the individual Obamacare exchanges in 2018, saying it would have a market-by-market strategy that hinges on 2017 profitability. The company said that losses due to sicker-than-expected customers in its individual Obamacare plans were a bit less than foreseen in the third quarter and that it was planning for a slight profit in that business next year. (11/2)

MARKETPLACE

The Associated Press: How to Choose the Right Amount for Your FSA in 2017
November is typically open enrollment time for millions who get health insurance, disability insurance and other benefits from an employer. If you’re one of them, among your important choices is whether you want a flexible spending account and how much money to deposit. FSAs are available through some employers as a part of benefits packages. You can spend FSA money only on “qualified medical expenses,” which are determined by the IRS. (Glover, 11/2)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The New York Times: Start-Ups for the End of Life
Death and dying can be costly, but they are rarely considered a business by consumers. Many would rather not ponder critical decisions about feeding tubes, funeral homes and other end-of-life issues until the need is thrust upon them. But as our population ages and the industry gets more attention, new firms — many of them technology companies — are setting out to compete on price and convenience. (Zimmerman, 11/2)

Stat: Genetic Test Costs US $500 Million a Year, with Little Benefit
We hear a lot about the wonders of genetic testing, how it can revolutionize medicine and find cures for fatal diseases. A new study from the University of Michigan also shows how it can waste a half a billion dollars a year. Researchers at the university examined testing for inherited thrombophilia, a genetic quirk that can indicate a patient’s likelihood of developing dangerous blood clots. It sounds like a useful test to have. But, according to the researchers, knowing that you have the trait will not change your treatment. (Ross, 11/2)

PHARMACEUTICALS

Kaiser Health News: FDA’s Drug Approval Team Copes with 700 Unfilled Jobs as Industry Lures Staff
The Food and Drug Administration has more than 700 job vacancies in its division that approves new drugs, and top officials say the agency is struggling to hire and retain staff because pharmaceutical companies lure them away. …The FDA has been under fire for taking too long to approve new drugs, despite approving a record number of generic drugs in 2015. Although it met its goal of hiring 1,000 new employees to help clear the backlog of unapproved generics, that program had nearly 200 job vacancies as of Sept. 30. And CDER itself had 711 openings out of 5,525 positions at the end of September, according to spokeswoman Theresa Eisenman — meaning that more than 1 out of 8 positions were empty. (Lupkin and Tribble, 11/3)
Reuters: West Virginia Urges Justice Dept to Reject Settlement with Mylan
West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey on Wednesday blasted Mylan NV's announced $465 million settlement with the U.S. Justice Department over the drugmaker's classification of its lifesaving allergy treatment EpiPen as a generic, saying the amount was "woefully deficient." The department has not acknowledged such a deal almost a month after Mylan announced it, and department spokeswoman Nicole Navas declined to comment on Wednesday. (Lynch, 11/2)

The New York Times: Lifesaving Cancer Drugs May in Rare Cases Threaten the Heart
Powerful drugs that enlist the immune system to fight cancer can, in rare cases, cause heart damage, doctors are reporting. So far, fewer than 1 percent of patients taking these medicines — called checkpoint inhibitors — have developed heart trouble. But in those who do, the damage can be severe, and the drugs have led to several deaths by provoking the immune system to attack the heart. (Grady, 11/2)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Los Angeles Times: Hey, Democrats — Donald Trump Has Some Good Ideas for Healthcare Reform
Donald Trump and running mate Mike Pence talked about their plans for the U.S. healthcare system again this week, beginning where Republicans usually begin: by calling for the complete repeal of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare. But to get where they say they want to go — providing more affordable health coverage for more Americans — they would be better off skipping that step and moving on to other elements of their plan. That's because their overall plan isn't fundamentally sound, but several of its planks could help shore up weaknesses in Obamacare. (Jon Healey, 11/3)
NPR: California Hospitals Make Patients Sign Away Their Right to Sue
San Francisco Bay Area companies say Sutter Health is strong-arming them into a contract that would help the hospital system secure its power over prices and potentially raise the cost of medical care for their employees in the future. Dozens of companies have received a letter, via their insurance administrators, asking them to waive their rights to sue Sutter. If they don’t, a fact sheet included in the letter says, the companies’ employees who get care through Sutter's network of hospitals, doctors and medical services will no longer have access to discounted in-network prices. (Dembosky, 11/4)

CAMPAIGN 2016

California Healthline: California Voters Divided On Drug Price Ballot Measure but Support Other Health Initiatives
Support for Proposition 61 has declined in recent weeks in the wake of fierce campaigning by pharma-backed opponents. (Ibarra, 11/4)

Los Angeles Times: Feeling Anxious about the Election? Here's How to Cope with Election Stress Disorder
Are you suffering from election stress disorder? It seems like everyone I know has it. Last week my kindergartner woke up at 5 a.m. with nightmares about “two people running for president.” One friend wrote on Facebook that she is barely sleeping at all and now fills the pre-dawn hours canning fruit. I’ve heard reports of chest pains and short-term Xanax prescriptions within my circle as Nov. 8 draws near. (Netburn, 11/4)

Kaiser Health News: Bad Hombres, Russian Hackers and … a Medical Device Tax?
In an election season in which the presidential campaign “issues” have ranged from “hot mics” to emails, some down-ballot campaign ads highlight a wonky, far less racy topic: a tax on medical devices. Really? Why? (Appleby, 11/4)

HEALTH LAW ISSUES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Bloomberg: Some Find Care Unaffordable, Even with Obamacare Coverage
While the ACA has pushed the uninsured rate in the U.S. near a record low, a Commonwealth Fund study this year found that about four in 10 adults in ACA plans aren’t confident they could afford care if they got sick. Affordability has become a major issue in the presidential campaign. Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, has pointed to rising premiums as a sign that the ACA doesn’t work, and promised to repeal it. Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate, has pledged to fix the law, in part by boosting subsidies to buy insurance. (Tracer and Doherty, 11/4)

Morning Consult: Obama Slams Republicans for Not Having Health Care Alternative
President Obama slammed Republicans for advocating for the repeal of the ACA, and for doing so without an alternative health plan. “They want to repeal because, ideologically, they’re opposed to the idea of helping these 20 million people get health insurance,” Obama said in Miami at a Hillary Clinton campaign event. “It’s not like — they don’t even have a pretense of a plan. They don’t even have a semblance of a plan. There’s not even a hint of a plan.” (McIntire, 11/3)
PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The New York Times: Young Adolescents as Likely to Die from Suicide as from Traffic Accidents
It is now just as likely for middle school students to die from suicide as from traffic accidents. That grim fact was published on Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They found that in 2014, the most recent year for which data is available, the suicide rate for children ages 10 to 14 had caught up to their death rate for traffic accidents. (Tavernise, 11/3)

Los Angeles Times: Every Year of Smoking Causes DNA Mutations that Make Cancer More Likely
Attention smokers: For every year that you continue your pack-a-day habit, the DNA in every cell in your lungs acquires about 150 new mutations. Some of those mutations may be harmless, but the more there are, the greater the risk that one or more of them will wind up causing cancer. (Kaplan, 11/3)

Stat: CTE Link to ALS Strengthened with Findings of Kevin Turner’s Autopsy
Kevin Turner, a high-profile professional football player who was thought to have died of ALS, was actually afflicted with the degenerative brain disorder chronic traumatic encephalopathy, according to results of his autopsy presented Thursday. The findings are the “best circumstantial evidence we will ever get that this ALS-type of motor neuron disease is caused by CTE,” said Dr. Ann McKee of the Boston University CTE Center at a press conference Thursday. (Swetlitz, 11/3)

NPR: Sleepy Teens Have More Trouble Learning
Researchers wanted to know more about the associations between the amount of sleep students get, how sleepy they are in the daytime and a brain function known as self-regulation — the ability to control emotions, cognitive functions and behavior. Night owls tend to have the hardest time with self-regulation, the researchers found. These students have more memory problems, are more impulsive, and get irritated and frustrated more easily. (Stein, 11/3)

The Washington Post: The Ebola Virus Mutated to Better Infect Humans During the 2014 Outbreak
The Ebola virus mutated to more effectively infiltrate human cells during the West African outbreak that killed more than 11,300 people between 2013 and 2016. That's the finding of two teams of virologists in studies published Thursday in the journal Cell. The scientists identified a mutation that changed the part of the virus that fits into receptors on the exterior of the host cell. (Kaplan, 11/3)

PHARMACEUTICALS

The generic drug industry was jolted on Thursday as shares of many major companies tumbled after a news report said that a federal inquiry into drug price-fixing was wider than previously believed and could lead to charges by the end of the year. Shares in Teva Pharmaceuticals, the world’s largest generic drug maker, fell more than 9 percent, and the stock of competitors like Mylan, Endo Pharmaceuticals and Impax Laboratories had similar declines. (Thomas, 11/3)
Stat: Sanders Calls for Federal Investigation of Insulin Prices
In his latest attack on the pharmaceutical industry, Senator Bernie Sanders has asked the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to investigate three insulin makers for price collusion. In a letter sent Thursday, Sanders and Representative Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) referred to a pattern in which prices for insulin sold by Eli Lilly, Sanofi, and Novo Nordisk often rose in tandem over several years. The lawmakers expressed concern that the drug companies may have been coordinating their pricing and, as a result, driving up the cost for millions of Americans, including both patients and taxpayers. (Silverman, 11/3)

Stat: Hospitals Itching for a Share of the Mylan Settlement over Medicaid Rebates
More than 1,200 hospitals around the country want to know if they were overcharged by Mylan Pharmaceuticals for the EpiPen auto-injector. In a letter sent earlier this week to the Department of Justice, an industry trade group called 340B Health cited a recent settlement in which Mylan agreed to a $465 million settlement to resolve accusations of shortchanging Medicaid by failing to pay the appropriate rebates. These hospitals participate in a federal program known as 340B in which drug makers must offer discounts of up to 50 percent on all outpatient drugs to hospitals and clinics that serve indigent populations. (Silverman, 11/3)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

Bloomberg: Help Medicaid by Tackling Homelessness
In a growing number of states, Medicaid directors have come to believe they could save money by housing the homeless. The federal government is providing money to find out if they're right. There's good reason to think this is an experiment worth trying. The idea arose from two developments. First, Obamacare's drastic expansion of eligibility for Medicaid coverage has raised the number of homeless people who sign up. These beneficiaries often suffer from unmanaged illnesses, which lead to higher health-care costs and put a strain on Medicaid budgets. Second, in recent years, policy makers have come to better understand how the way people live affects their medical needs. (11/3)

Ventura County Star: Camarillo Health Agency Needs Transparency
Allegations revealed last week of fraud and breach of duty by the former longtime chief executive officer of the Camarillo Health Care District raise some troubling questions for this public agency. The agency has sued Jane Rozanski, who led the district for 22 years, charging that she conspired to inflate legal bills for new district counsel Ralph Ferguson and then manipulated the budget to try to hide $425,000 in payments over four years. The suit alleges Rozanski and Ferguson had a romantic relationship during that time. Her attorney has said the claims are "absolutely false." (11/1)