Westchester Physician

April 2021

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE RISKY BUSINESS

It goes without saying that the last year has been a real emotional roller coaster ride, increasingly discouraging statistics punctuated by hope inspiring good news. As the pandemic wears on, it is harder to get excited by uplifting news, like increasing vaccination rates. Early this year there was a definite feeling of excitement as we began to roll up our sleeves and get our first covid vaccination. I remember walking out of Greenwich Hospital last December, my "crush" sticker proudly affixed to my jacket and breathing sighs of relief. More recently. though, my equanimity has been disturbed by reports of vaccine hesitancy, even among healthcare workers. I work at a large multispecialty practice and at a recent meeting, the CEO announced that the vaccination rate among all employees was just a bit over 50%, despite now having a surfeit of vaccines. What is most discouraging is that the national percentage of Americans who are resisting vaccination covid is far higher than resistance to all other vaccinations such as measles or flu.

It is not totally unexpected because it is human nature to underplay the risk of things that have been part of our daily fabric for a long time and to fear the new. It is disheartening though because our collective health and a return to normalcy depends on a high rate of vaccination in order to bring this scourge under control. That return to normal remains a tantalizing vision that seems to hang out just out of reach, like a carrot hanging in front of a donkey.

David Leonhardt of the New York Times has recently published a series of columns about how humans typically assess risk vis a vie covid. A typical example is how casual we are about automobile travel. It is not in the forefront of our minds that a simple 20 minute drive could result in a fatal crash. Interestingly enough, the pandemic has had an effect on automobile deaths. Early on, many people stayed home and the roads were relatively free of traffic. Ironically, instead of reducing the number of automobile related deaths (ie fewer drivers, fewer deaths, makes sense, right), there was an 8 % increase of fatalities over the year preceding the pandemic the fatality rate per 100

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Peter J. Acker, MD President, WCMS

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UPCOMING EVENTS

WAM/WCMS Virtual CME Event Tuesday, May 4—7:00pm Via Zoom

ANNUAL MEETING & GOLF OUTING June 22, 2021 Westchester Country Club Rye, NY

WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

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FROM THE EDITOR... COINCIDENCE PETER J. ACKER, MD

This is one of my favorite columns from years ago - no mention of COVID!

One of humankind's pleasurable experiences is that of coincidence – running into someone that you were "just thinking about" or reading a novel that outlines an experience you just had or finding out that the person next you on a train shares the same birthday. I suppose it is that element of surprise that lifts us out of our humdrum quotidian existence and freeing us just for an instance from the predictability of life, allowing us to forget the Newtonian physics of cause and affect and enter a more Einsteinian time warp. Sometimes, as is our nature, there is an attempt to insert meaning into coincidence and indeed it is hard not to do so if you say meet the love of your life via noticing that a person on the subway is carrying the same book that you are reading and a meeting ensues.

Coincidence is oft used as a literary device – in skilled hands it can reveal irony or hidden meaning. In less skilled hands, it can be merely a lazy author's way of injecting suspense or advancing plot. One of the most common types of coincidence in literature involves birth such as Oedipus banished as a baby who by sheer chance ends up marrying his mother and killing his father. Another example is in **Oliver Twist** in which a major plot element hinges on the secret origins of the orphan Oliver and the way he discovers them which enriches the plot and also puts into sharp relief the irony of class distinction and privilege.

Hopefully, the reader has followed me onto this third paragraph, but is probably wondering where I'm going with this and perhaps thinking that he or she got enough literary stuff while fulfilling the one year English requirement for premeds. But, as I often say to my kids after a long preamble, I'm getting to the point! I had two recent experiences that involved birth and coincidence.

My eldest daughter Karen was born at NYU where I did my residency and in fact due to some artful planning, came into life exactly one week after my residency had been completed. It was long overnight labor on July 4th weekend. One obstetrician was covering for many and the house was packed. As it turned out, my best friend in residency, an Aussie named John Paul, a third year resident, was on call and though the delivery was not high risk, attended at 3 AM on a Sunday, did the first exam and assigned the APGARs (10, 10 – I mean that's what friends are for). John Paul after various peregrinations, returned to Australia and over a number of years we completely lost touch, to the point that I no longer had his phone number or email. Out of the blue, I got a call from him and we had very nice reunion with him, my wife and my daughters.

The more discerning of you are probably crying foul – that really isn't a coincidence! Hang on, there's more. Shortly after John Paul winged his way back to Sydney, my youngest daughter Daniella was scheduled to

(Continued on page 6)



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STOP THE TRAIN Elliot Barsh, MD

"Poetry is language against which we have no defenses."

-David Whyte

Hi everyone.

I hope this month's newsletter finds you healthy and safe.

April 2021, National Poetry Month, marks the 25th annual celebration of poets and poetry.

According to Krista Tippett from *On Being*, **"Poetry has the power to bring out the best in us and for us."**

It can hold everything we feel, our grief and our joy, without being afraid of it.

Poetry helps us begin to understand that we are not alone in our struggle to be here, and accept ourselves for who we are and who we are not.

Through poetry, our past, present, and future come together to help us go beyond who we imagine ourselves to be.

Thanks for reading, and give these poems a try.

Be safe.

Everything Is Waiting For you by David Whyte

https://commongood.cc/reader/everything-iswaiting-for-you/

Go To The Limits of Your Longing by Ranier Maria Rilke

https://gratefulness.org/resource/go-limitslonging/

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/ peace-wild-things-0/

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

https://www.best-poems.net/mary_oliver/ wild_geese.html

The House of Belonging by David Whyte

https://onbeing.org/poetry/the-house-ofbelonging/

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Walk-in Appointments for COVID-19 Open at Mass Vaccination Sites

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that beginning April 23, 16 mass vaccination sites will accept walk-in appointments for individuals age 60 and older. New York State will set aside a vaccine allocation to facilitate this expanded vaccination access. Proof of identity and insurance information, if applicable, will be needed. A listing of the 16 sites can be found here: <u>Click Here</u>

This week, the Governor's Executive Orders removed the penalties for not administering the COVID-19 vaccine in seven days <u>Click</u> <u>Here</u>

There has been 43% of the New York State population that have received one dose and 29.7% have completed the series. For a list of guidance and other information, physicians and other health care providers are encouraged to go to: <u>Click Here</u> (CLANCY)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE RISKY BUSINESS PETER J. ACKER, MD (Continued from page 1)

million miles driven rose 24%. The wide open roads led to increasingly reckless driving as people enjoyed the "freedom of the open road".

It behooves us heath care workers to face this issue head on and one way to do that is to be knowledgeable about the comparative statistics of risk assessment and the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of vaccination against covid. Recently there have been reports of vaccinated people getting covid and even dying from it. It is important to emphasize the extreme rarity of these events when compared to deaths from influenza, car accidents and most importantly to covid in the unvaccinated. Israel, which has the highest vaccination rate per capita in the world, is worth citing as an example. A recent study of 602,000 Israelis that were vaccinated, only 21 needed hospitalization. Another statistic worth citing: among vaccinated individuals, the hospitalization rate per 100,000 vaccinated was 3.5 compared to 150/100,000 hospitalized during a typical flu season.

Collectively, I am hoping we can lick this thing and very much looking forward to seeing many of my colleagues and society members in person and not on zoom!

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FROM THE EDITOR... COINCIDENCE PETER J. ACKER, MD (Continued from page 2)

have minor surgery at Greenwich Hospital. She needed some preop tests and she asked that I meet her at the hospital. After finishing rounds, while I was waiting in the lobby for her, I spotted a familiar face moving towards me. It took me a minute to recognize her. It was the OB nurse who had attended Daniella's birth 18 years before who I had not seen in a decade or more. We had a great talk, though she seemed nonplussed on learning that it had been 18 years! What does this all mean? Nothing in the grand scheme of things, but it was exciting to have memories jogged of the births of two of my three children. Now I'm sure, just around the next corner, is one of the attendees of Jessica's births 24 years ago!

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ACCELERATED AND ADVANCED PAYMENT (AAP)NETTINGS/OFFSETS ACROSS ORGANIZATION AFFILIATIONS

We are receiving an influx of calls to our Provider Contact Center with regard to recoupment of AAPs with providers questioning recoupments on funds they believe their practice did not receive.

Here's what you need to know:

CMS has implemented a change to begin netting/offsetting provider money across affiliated provider within the same Tax ID Number and also across workloads within a single organization. The CMS change brings consistency to all Medicare contractors regarding netting across organization affiliations.

Definition of Affiliated Providers:

Affiliated providers are providers that share the same Tax ID number across multiple Provider Transaction Access Numbers (PTANs). It's important to know that CMS policy is recouping based on the Tax ID number rather than the PTAN. CMS instructs contractors to use the Tax ID to get the recoupment of the advanced payment regardless of which PTAN actually received the payment. We are asking you to collaborate with all affiliated providers under one Tax ID number.

If you are part of a group, you did not receive an AAP, and you see the recoupment on your remittance advice; reach out to your other group providers to determine which PTAN received the AAP.

Any or each related provider (same Tax ID) to the PTAN that received the AAP will each offset 25% of the total Remittance Advice (RA) amount. Any affiliate PTANs will offset 25% of their remaining amount on their RA after any regular AR or ERS offsets are made.

The NGS Provider Outreach and Education Team is conducting COVID-19 Advanced Payment, Repayment and Recoupment Process training and Let's Chat sessions.

Please visit our Education Tab for a schedule of sessions

Resources:

Part_A_Education_Events_Schedule Part_B_Education_Events_Schedule CMS AAP FAQs Accelerated And<u>Advance Payment Program</u>











WCMS & WAM PRESENT A VIRTUAL CME EVENT TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2021 7:00PM VIA ZOOM



PATIENT ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

THE COMMON THREAD: THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

PRESENTED BY: MAUVAREEN BEVERLEY, MD

<u>Course Objective</u>: For the learners to discuss and identify how changes in behavior have a beneficial effect on patient engagement, the patient experience and health outcomes of vulnerable populations:

- Increase empathy
- · Respect and understand the patient's cultural beliefs regarding their health
- · Prevent judgmental behavior directed at patients
- Maintain patient dignity
- · Perception vs reality of the individual patient

Accreditation Statement

The Westchester Academy of Medicine is accredited by The Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY) to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

The Westchester Academy of Medicine designates this live activity for a maximum of 1.0 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits[™]. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Click here or email jmiller@wcms.org to register

Zoom link will be provided upon registration. This program is open to all MSSNY members free of charge.

REQUIREMENT TO DISCUSS ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT SERVICES BEFORE PRESCRIBING OPIOID IS MOVING IN NYS LEGISLATURE

The New York State Senate Health Committee will consider S.4640, sponsored by Senator Gustavo Rivera, which would require physicians and other health practitioners before prescribing an opioid medication to consider, discuss and refer or prescribe alternative services such as chiropractic, massage therapy or behavioral therapy. Its companion measure (A. 273) is in on the Assembly floor for a vote and is sponsored by Assemblymember Richard Gottfried. The Medical Society of the State of New York is opposed to this measure. MSSNY is concerned that this legislation will ultimately create significant new documentation requirements for prescribers that will simply deter more physicians from prescribing pain medications for those patients that truly need them.

Additionally, in 2018 the Legislature enacted a law requiring all prescriptions for treating patient chronic pain to be consistent with the CDC chronic pain guidelines. Importantly, these guidelines already include a component that directs physicians and other prescribers to seek alternatives to prescribing opioids in consultation with their patients. Physicians are encouraged to contact members of the Senate Health Committee by calling 518-455-2800. Senator committee members are: Senators Gustavo Rivera, Patrick Gallivan, Brian Benjamin, Alessandra Biaggi, Phil Boyle, Samra Brouk, Brad Hoylman, Todd Kaminsky, Rachel May, Peter Oberacker, Edward Rath, Sean Ryan, Julia Salazar, Daniel Stec, and Kevin Thomas. **(CLANCY)**

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MSSNY URGES PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE PAYMENT PARITY TO PHYSICIANS FOR TELEHEALTH SERVICES

Physicians are urged to contact their legislators to urge that they support legislation (A.6526/S.5505) that will ensure insurer payments to physicians for delivering telehealth services including video, and audio-only visits, are on par with those received for in -office appointments. The Assembly bill, before the Assembly Insurance Committee, is sponsored by Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner (D- Saratoga) and Assemblyman Richard N. Gottfried (D- Manhattan) and the Senate bill, before the Finance Committee, is sponsored by Senator Gustavo Rivera (D- Bronx) and Senator Peter Harckham (D- Peekskill). A letter can be sent from here: <u>Urge Legislators to Support Pay-</u><u>ment Parity in Telehealth</u>

The COVID19 pandemic forced patients and physicians to embrace new ways to deliver care. While some New York physicians had already integrated Telemedicine into their practices, prior to the onset of the pandemic, the pandemic pushed thousands of physicians to quickly increase their capacity to provide care to their patients remotely. From the start, though, payments to physicians from insurers for care delivered by telehealth were woefully inadequate to what they were receiving for in-office visits, creating a barrier to care for many patients.

MSSNY has argued for some time that rates at which physicians are paid by insurers have not kept pace with those paid for in-office visits and the withering financial situation for physician practices during COVID exacerbated the disparity. To better understand the impact of inadequate payment on physician practices, surveys conducted by key MSSNY partners, of their memberships, revealed the following:

• Participants of a survey by the New York Medical Group Management Association (NY MGMA), revealed that only 23% of all health plans pay equal to what they received for in-office visits.

• 25% said that most plans pay significantly less for in-office visits. More specifically, surveys conducted by MSSNY partner organizations found that while Telehealth visits conducted by video were reimbursed at higher rates than audio-only, physicians were compensated as little as 30% the rate of in-person appointments, depending on the health plan.

• Audio-only visits were the least compensated, with most payers reimbursing 80% less than for in-office visits.

The bill requires payment parity for telehealth services in the state's Medicaid Fee for Service, Medicaid Managed Care, and Child Health Plus programs. This is crucial to achieving true equity in health care access, in New York, as without parity across all systems Medicaid providers may not have the financial capacity to provide Telehealth services to beneficiaries, including low-income patients, and those with transportation or childcare challenges, creating a hurdle that doesn't exist in commercial insurance.

Physicians are urged to contact their legislators to ask that they support this legislation. <u>Urge Legislators</u> to <u>Support Payment Parity in Telehealth</u> (CARY)



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Westchester Academy of Medicine 2021 Golf Outing & Fundraiser

Tuesday, June 22, 2021 Westchester Country Club 99 Biltmore Avenue Rye, NY 10580



Registration, Driving Range & Halfway House Lunch Tee times will vary based on COVID restrictions at the time of the event Golf Format: Scramble 6:00 PM—Annual Meeting Dinner

If you are unable to attend, please consider making a tax-deductible donation. Contact Kalli Voulgaris kvoulgaris@wcms.org or 914-967-9100 for more details.

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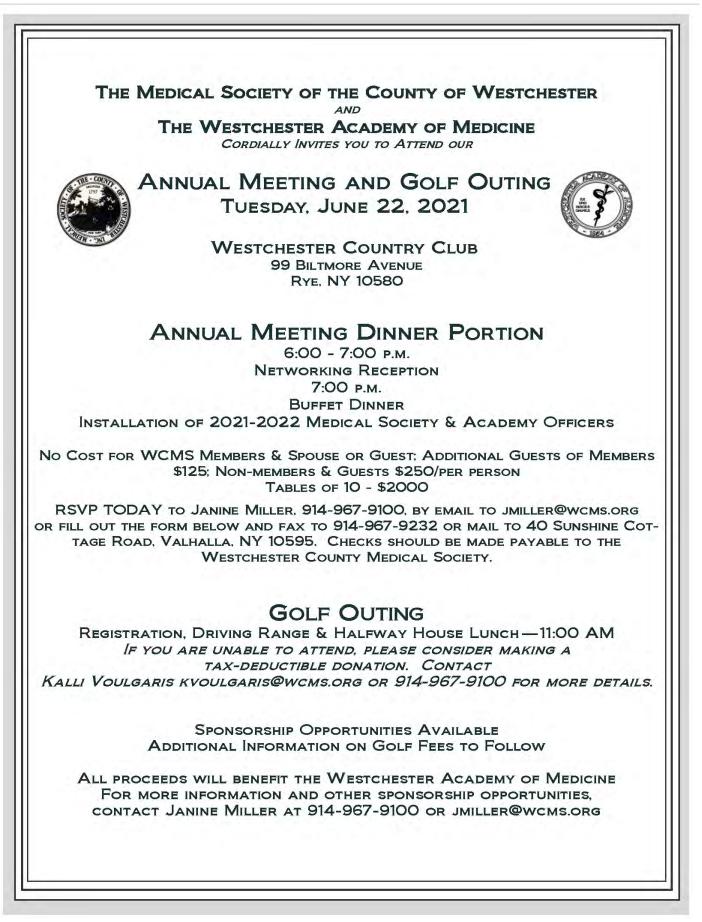
Additional Sponsorship Opportunities Available for our Annual Meeting being hosted in conjunction with our Golf Outing

All proceeds will benefit the Westchester Academy of Medicine For more information and other sponsorship opportunities, contact Janine Miller at 914-967-9100 or jmiller@wcms.org

Golf Reservations are Limited—Please RSVP Today!

Please note that proof of COVID vaccine OR a negative COVID test within 72 hours of the event are required. Contact tracing measures will be taken, so please be prepared to provide all necessary information ahead of the event or upon arrival.

For sign-up form and further information please visit: http://www.wcms.org/Home/Events/WCMS-Annual-Meeting-Golf-Outing





MSSNY Announces two NEW Podcasts on COVID-19 ★ A Discussion on COVID Vaccine for Patients ★

MSSNY President, Dr. Bonnie Litvack, President-elect, Dr. Joseph Sellers and Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY's Committee on Infectious Diseases discuss vaccines currently available for COVID-19 and answer many questions patients may have about the vaccines.

★ How to Talk to Patients About Vaccine Hesitancy ★

Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY's Committee on Infectious Diseases discusses the history of vaccine hesitancy and offers sage advice to listeners on talking to vaccine hesitant patients.

The additions of these podcasts marks 100 podcasts published on the MSSNY Podcast website!





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