

## THE MONTH'S TOP STORIES

### NEW RECORD HIGH FOR OPIOID-RELATED DEATHS IN HENNEPIN COUNTY

Hennepin County experienced a more than 47 percent increase in opioid-related deaths from 2015 to 2017, according to preliminary statistics from the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office. There were 162 opioid-related deaths in 2017, up from 153 in 2016, and the sheriff's office expects that the number for 2017 will increase as final numbers are determined.

"This is startling to see an almost 50 percent increase in opioid-related deaths during the past two years," said Rich Stanek, Hennepin County Sheriff. "For this reason, the sheriff's office will be utilizing all local and federal resources available to us to prevent the illegal supply of drugs from entering our community, and to raise awareness of the public safety and public health epidemic."

In 2016, the sheriff's office launched a drug abuse prevention campaign called #NOOverdose in response to the then record-high numbers. It partnered with school-parent organizations, law enforcement agencies, elected officials, businesses, and health and community organizations to assist in educating the community about current drug dangers, trends, and prevention strategies.

"The Sheriff's Office participated in nearly 130 #NOOverdose events during 2017, from speaking to small groups at local rotary meetings, or partnerships with the Minnesota Vikings and Twins, to educating State Fair goers during all 12 days of the event at our #NOOverdose booth. With each event, we realized that many community members were not aware of the dangers that opioids pose and the impacts they have on all families, in every part of the country," said Stanek. "There is still more education that is needed, and we will continue our #NOOverdose drug prevention campaign during 2018."

From 2013 through 2017, the county experienced more than 650 opioid-related deaths. Opioid-related deaths in 2017 also included fatalities due to carfentanil for the first time, with at least 14 attributed to the synthetic drug by the end of the year.

### RESEARCH SHOWS NEARLY EIGHT-FOLD PRICE DIFFERENCES AT HOSPITALS

Actual prices paid for four common procedures at Minnesota hospitals varied widely among hospitals, according to a new report from a collaboration between the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and employers in the state.

The report, based on commercial payer data only, assesses actual prices paid for

## IN BRIEF

### YMCA AT GAVIIDAE TO BUILD WELL-BEING CENTER

The YMCA at Gaviidae in downtown Minneapolis plans to build an innovative well-being center with a \$2.5 million gift from the Penny and Bill George Family Foundation.

The George Wellbeing Center will connect people with integrative health and healing practices that have been shown to reduce stress, promote healing, and improve health outcomes. It will offer services including lifestyle and nutritional counseling, massage therapy, reiki, aromatherapy, meditation, light therapy, tai chi, yoga, and acupuncture.

The center will house the Healthy Living Program for holistic well-being, which leverages existing community partnerships to link services for underserved populations. Culturally based healing practices will also be integrated into the program, supported by the work of the Catalyst Initiative of The Minneapolis Foundation.

The center will be the first of its kind offered at any Y location in the U.S. It will serve as a model and initial testing ground for other Ys in the metro area, as well as nationally.

### ST. LUKE'S OFFERS BABY BOXES TO NEW PARENTS

St. Luke's has partnered with the non-profit Babies Need Boxes Northland

49<sup>TH</sup>  
SESSION



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hospital facility fees in Minnesota. They used information from the Minnesota All Payer Claims Database, which consists of data without personal identifiers and includes information from more than 1.1 billion health care claims from payers covering more than 4.3 million Minnesotans.

They discovered that while the average price for knee replacement in Minnesota was \$23,997, the range in price paid to hospitals between July 2014 and June 2015 ranged from \$6,186 to \$46,974, representing a nearly eight-fold difference between the lowest and highest price hospitals. In addition, the average price for a cesarean section delivery was \$10,234, with actual prices paid to hospitals ranging from \$4,693 to \$22,831, representing a nearly five-fold difference.

“This is eye opening information for the purchasers of health care,” said Carolyn Pare, president and CEO of the Minnesota Health Action Group. “Employers have long suspected that there is a great deal of variation in both the quality and the cost of health care, but to be able to see the actual numbers provides them an opportunity to make better purchasing decisions. Employers can also help employees and their family members identify and access more affordable care.”

The groups conducted the research in an attempt to better understand health care across the state and gain information that will help them choose networks with competitive prices. MDH plans to publish prices for other common hospital procedures in 2018, which may include heart procedures or back surgery.

## LARGEST FREE DENTAL CLINIC IN MINNESOTA MOVES, EXPANDS AS NEWLY INDEPENDENT NONPROFIT

Hope Dental Clinic, the largest free dental clinic in Minnesota, has moved from the basement of a Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities campus building to its own office wing in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood in St. Paul after 53 years of operation. It was previously part of Union Gospel Mission Twin Cities, but now operates as a separate nonprofit organization with its own location.

According to Hope Dental Clinic, about 30 percent of Minnesotans do not have dental insurance, and that number increases to nearly 60 percent among elderly Minnesotans.

In 2017, it served a record number of 2,347 of these patients and performed a total of 11,815 procedures. The clinic requests a \$20 administrative fee for those in need of dental services, or whatever they can afford, and does not turn patients away. The new location allows an increased patient capacity of 30 percent and provides ample office space for staff and volunteers, as well as a more welcoming atmosphere. Once the new clinic is firmly established, the nonprofit plans to expand its mobile dentistry and area education efforts.

The clinic relies on help from a pool of 400 to 500 volunteers (including 50 dentists) and 11 paid staff members to operate. It also has partnerships with multiple schools

## IN BRIEF continued...

to give every mom who delivers at its Birthing Center a baby box, which is a specially made cardboard box intended to be baby's first bed.

The box comes equipped with a mattress and safe bedding, as well as support items such as diapers, wipes, and breastfeeding supplies. It also includes an educational video that helps explain safe sleep practices to new parents. The boxes have been independently tested and meet the safety qualifications of a bassinet.

The move was made after seeing the profound impact that baby boxes had on parents in Finland, which has one of the lowest infant mortality rates at 2.3 percent for every 1,000 births. Finland has been giving away these baby boxes for the past 75 years. Meanwhile, the U. S. rate is nearly three times Finland's.

“We made a connection right away, and worked on a partnership so we could provide a baby box to every mom who delivers at St. Luke's,” said Lori Swanson, RN, nurse manager at St. Luke's Birthing Center.

## CENTRACARE OPENS CLINIC IN FOLEY GROCERY STORE

CentraCare Health has partnered with Coborn's, Inc. to open a new quickClinic walk-in clinic in the Coborn's grocery store in Foley. The renovated space includes a waiting area and two exam rooms and is open from 7 a.m. to 7 pm. daily.

“Health care is changing—and so are the needs of our community,” said Ken Holmen, MD, president and CEO of



**TOP STORIES continued...**

to engage students who are studying to enter the dental field and about half of Hope Dental Clinic's volunteers are students.

"We are hopeful that the new facility will help us to attract even more volunteers, and we're particularly in need of dentists to serve individuals during daytime hours," said Flotterud.

**MINNESOTA LAUNCHES AUTISM RESOURCE WEBSITE**

A website to share information about autism is now available for people with autism, as well as parents, teachers, and social service and health care professionals across Minnesota. The Minnesota Autism Resource website ([mn.gov/autism](http://mn.gov/autism)) was developed collaboratively by the Minnesota departments of Human Services, Education, Health, and Employment and Economic Development.

The website will use crowdsourcing for some of its content—individuals and organizations can submit content to post on the website to keep it continually evolving based on community needs and input. Interested parties can also find a map of autism-related organizations in Minnesota; a calendar of autism-related events; a job board where autism organizations can post job opportunities; and educational content.

"This new website is just one part of our commitment to improve autism services in Minnesota," said Emily Piper, human services commissioner. "We want Minnesotans interested in autism to have the opportunity to connect with one another, share and learn about autism, and access our state's services and supports for people with autism. Community participation will drive the website's access."

**NEUROLOGICAL ASSOCIATES OF ST. PAUL MERGES WITH FAIRVIEW**

Neurological Associates of St. Paul (NASP) joined the combined HealthEast and Fairview Health Services system, effective Dec. 26, 2017.

NASP is comprised of five physicians and 18 staff members at two locations in Maplewood and downtown St. Paul. It has worked with HealthEast for more than 30 years. The providers refer patients to one another and NASP providers already practice in HealthEast's hospitals.

"NASP has provided neurological care at HealthEast hospitals since 1986, and it was a natural fit for our practice to merge with our broader system for a better patient experience, seamless care coordination, and to lead the change for an even better model of neurological care in the Twin Cities," said Nadeem Iqbal, MD, physician at NASP.

**IN BRIEF continued...**

CentraCare Health. "And by partnering with those within our community, we can achieve our goal of improving the health of every patient every day by making access to care convenient for those we serve."

The health care system already has a quickClinic at Coborn's Waite Park location, and another is expected to open soon in Sartell.

**MNSURE REACHES NEW ENROLLMENT RECORD**

A record number of Minnesotans have signed up for private health plans during MNSure's open enrollment period. This year's 116,358 enrollees breaks the previous year's record of 114,810.

The total number of enrollments through MNSure was 209,460, which included 93,102 public program enrollments. More than 60 percent of enrollees qualified for advanced premium tax credits, with a yearly average per household of \$6,912.

"This was MNSure's most successful open enrollment ever," said Allison O'Toole, MNSure CEO. "Not only did a record number of Minnesotans sign up for coverage, but system enhancements and new tools, like the courtesy callback feature, helped make the consumer experience better than ever before."

MNSure also recently signed a contract with a technology vendor to improve the current system. Those upgrades will be implemented over the next two years.

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