



Norbert Goldfield, MD

Founder, CEO

Ask Nurses & Doctors LLC

72 Laurel Park

Northampton MA 01060

413-800-2680

norbert@asknursesdoctors.com

www.asknursesdoctors.com

[@asknursesdoctors.com](https://www.instagram.com/asknursesdoctors.com)

April 18, 2022

Life expectancy dropped by 2 years; Nurses as diplomats

Due to the COVID pandemic, life expectancy in the U.S. fell by two years in 2020 to about 77 years – [a drop greater than in any other high income country](#). Hispanics and Blacks, especially men, suffered the most (each about 3.5 years). Drug overdoses are [an important part of this tragic story](#): at least 105,000 overdose deaths in 2021 – up from 93,000 the year before with a jump in overdose deaths among 14 -18 year olds. An [article](#) on the NJ county with the highest COVID death rate reaffirms that Republicans are at greatest risk of death. Misinformation is a considerable part of the American challenge. Unfortunately, Republican lawmakers in some states are [protecting](#) health professionals who peddle disinformation.

As a whole, however, health professionals are key first responders in every respect for this pandemic. This [article which just came out in American Nurse \(circulation 125,000\)](#) highlights the role of nurses as diplomats in the COVID culture wars. AND is highlighted.

COVID cases - but not hospitalizations - are rising again. I had a patient last week, an emergency medical technician who went to work with “a cold”; his co-workers insisted that he get tested and he was positive. As we caught it early, I prescribed him one of the new COVID oral medications. The booster vaccine that I received last week does protect me from the serious consequences of COVID. But for how long is a question that still needs [more research](#).

The mental health consequences of the COVID pandemic continue to be in the news. 4 in 10 adults [reported](#) significant mental health issues in 2020. I had another patient last week who spoke to me about his anger caused by isolation during the pandemic. He was proactive and has taken anger management classes at the VA.

The Biden administration is [seriously addressing](#) the issue of medical debt at the executive level (via regulation) as health system reform legislation for now is not passing Congress.

COVID has highlighted socioeconomic disparities in health, a phenomenon impacting our entire health system. Congenital syphilis which was almost eradicated in 2000 is a particularly egregious example of this system wide problem. In 2012, 332 babies were born infected with the disease. In 2021, [that number had climbed nearly sevenfold](#). 166 of those babies died. In Southern states, a [CDC study of 2018 data](#) found that the largest share of congenital syphilis cases were among women who had been tested and diagnosed but hadn't received treatment! Among Black moms who gave birth to a baby with

syphilis, 37% had not been treated adequately even though they'd received a timely diagnosis. White moms: that number was 24%.

FDA approval of COVID vaccines saves millions of lives. Yet the FDA's drug approval process in general is mixed. The FDA's decision to approve the Alzheimer drug Aduhelm was followed by the CMS (Medicare payment agency) refusal to allow payment unless one is being followed in a research trial. The CMS decision was correct. Despite [the many articles](#) written trying to explain the FDA decision, [the FDA drug approval process](#) needs significant improvement.

The current national legislative push largely revolves around federal funding for COVID programs and for drug pricing reform. Both are currently stymied. In response, action is occurring at a state level. Kentucky [just passed legislation](#) on insulin. We at AND are happy to work with local health professionals on drug pricing op-eds and other social media outreach.

Norbert Goldfield, M.D.