Practice Greenhealth estimates that 25% of hospital waste is plastic, largely encompassing single-use instruments and sterile wrappers that are not being recycled. For all the benefits of plastic—it’s cheap and clean, durable but disposable, and it can be sterilized easily and even be treated with a microbe-resistant coating—it also has a terrible, far-reaching, and long-lasting impact on the planet. Plastic waste pollutes our oceans, consumes fossil fuels, and contaminates the environment. But what’s the cost of making hospitals greener, for facilities and potentially patients? Plastic has become so entrenched in practice and procedures that abiding by the three Rs, “reuse, reduce, recycle,” may be easier said than done, particularly if there aren’t enough viable alternatives to help hospitals become more sustainable while keeping their patients and staff safe.
Behavioral Health — Learning the Language of Depression

It isn't surprising that using these three words might be a sign of depression: “lonely,” “sad,” and “miserable.” But what about words like “me,” “myself,” and “I”? A recent study published in *Clinical Psychological Science* looking at the relationship between depression and language suggests that using more first person singular pronouns than second and third person pronouns like “you” and “they” shows that people with depression are more focused on themselves and disconnected with other people. And of course, how people say something is just as important as what they say—or don’t say. In their big text analysis of online comments in mental health forums, researchers identified other potential signifiers of depression that go beyond the expected negative emotion words, such as absolutist words (e.g., “always,” “nothing,” and “completely”). Learning to recognize these linguistic patterns may help us better understand those with depression, as well as classify mental health conditions, and listening and looking for certain words may even help save lives.

Long-Term Care — Can You Hear Me Now?

When someone is going deaf, it turns out they lose a lot more than just their hearing, including opportunities for social interactions, which can lead to loneliness, depression, dementia, and even death. One study shows that as people under the age of 70 lose their hearing, their risk of loneliness increases at a rate of 7% per each decibel drop in perception. Another study equates the detrimental health effects of prolonged loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The problem is even more of a challenge to address when the hearing loss is so gradual the patient isn’t aware that it is happening, or they can’t...
**Can You Hear Me Now? (cont’d)**

afford or refuse to use hearing devices. A study in *JAMA Otolaryngology — Head and Neck Surgery* found that untreated hearing loss increases the risk of dementia by 50%, depression by 40%, and falls by 30% over ten years. But help may be on the horizon. Ongoing studies are looking at the potential impact of hearing aids in staving off dementia, and Congress has approved the sale of over-the-counter hearing devices, which will provide another alternative to the low-cost “personal sound amplification products” available now at some drugstores.

**Infection Prevention — With Flu, Hand Sanitizer is a Washout**

Researchers in Japan have found that rubbing with hand sanitizer for 15–30 seconds does not protect against the flu when hands are soiled with wet mucous. Their study, published in *mSphere* last month, seems to support what the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization already recommend—wash your hands with soap and water whenever your hands are visibly dirty or visibly soiled with blood or other body fluids.

**Improving Diagnosis — Smoking Out the Truth About Vaping**

With the rise in vaping-related lung disease cases around the United States, doctors are being tasked with diagnosing patients who present with shortness of breath and a cough, fever and fatigue, and nausea and vomiting—and NBC News reports that many of them are being misdiagnosed with bronchitis or a virus. But when patients don’t recover in a few days and symptoms worsen, they seek emergency medical attention and end up hospitalized, even in the ICU or on ventilators. Some patients have died. The CDC has been updating their recommendations as they investigate the cause of e-cigarette, or vaping, product use associated lung injury (EVALI), and the Food and Drug Administration advises people to avoid potentially counterfeit vaping products. Meanwhile, doctors are telling people that if they vape and experience any of these symptoms, they should get checked out.

**Medication Safety — A Little Bit Goes a Long Way to Treating Pain**

It may seem like fringe medicine or counterintuitive, but for many patients suffering from chronic pain, the best relief has come not from opioids but from low doses of a drug designed to treat opioid addiction: naltrexone. Unfortunately, since this 50-year-old drug is generic, Big Pharma won’t touch it, and thus the Food and Drug Administration won’t approve it as a pain treatment. So those who rely on it to go about their day-to-day lives pain-free must resort to paying for the drug out of pocket and reducing 50 mg pills into doses a tenth their size or sourcing naltrexone from compounding pharmacies. Another issue is that its relative obscurity means many doctors aren’t yet aware of it as an option for their patients.
Once upon a time, school bullying was accepted as a normal part of childhood, a rite of passage that made kids who suffered it tougher. The perception of bullying, clinically termed peer victimization, has shifted over the decades. We now know that bullying—intentional, often ongoing behavior that physically or emotionally harms a student, at school or online—has a long-lasting, negative effect on children. This can include depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, lower academic performance, and a greater chance of unemployment. Recently, researchers delving into the mysteries of the brain and how bullying affects it have found some surprising and disturbing new information: Bullying may actually shape the structure of the brain itself.

The study found the brain’s response to bullying is similar to changes shown in children and adults who were neglected or abused in childhood; in other words, bullying is another form of trauma that can have a profound and lifelong impact. It perhaps functions in the same way as other traumas, triggering the stress hormone cortisol, which seems to affect brain development. And just as demonstrating the neurological effects of maltreatment through brain scans helped secure support for research and interventions for child abuse, making the connection between bullying and the brain may lead to a deeper understanding of both, and stronger efforts to prevent and cope with bullying.