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***March, edition of M.D. Pharmacy's monthly newsletter. Articles regarding your medications, their safety, and the politics behind the price you pay for them. Please share this with your neighbors.***

### ***Cash-strapped U.S. Patients May Be Skipping Drugs***

Americans with financial worries because of the ailing economy may be skipping needed prescription drugs in a wrong-headed attempt to save money, according to a recent study. Nearly 95 percent of doctors surveyed said they have some concern that patients may not be taking a prescribed drug correctly because of the economic climate. The biggest concern expressed, was that patients were simply not filling prescriptions, skipping doses, or splitting pills. (ed.note) Even though many pharmacies are actively switching patients to less expensive generic drugs, their cost can still be a drain, especially on fixed incomes. We urge anyone finding themselves in such a position to communicate with their pharmacist. There are several programs available that will assist patients in need, so that they can avoid the problems associated with skipping medications, such as worsening of their medical condition, hospital or emergency room visits, and increased costs in the long run. (Reuters and editor)

### ***Green Tea Makes Cancer Drug Completely Ineffective***

U.S. researchers found that the widely used supplement "green tea" renders the cancer drug Velcade used for myeloma and lymphoma completely ineffective. These findings were completely unexpected, as the researchers had hoped to find that the active ingredients in green tea would actually enhance the therapeutic action of Velcade, not inhibit it. Many herbal "remedies" including green tea have become a popular treatment for cancer patients dealing with side-effects of chemotherapy. However, these supplements are unregulated and for most, their beneficial and/or detrimental effects have not been qualified through research. (ed.note) Many of these supplements are sold by so-called "health-food stores", whose sales personnel work on commission, and have very little if any medical/pharmaceutical education or knowledge. (UPI and editor)

### ***FTC Accuses Firms of Delaying Generic Drug Launch***

Federal regulators accused Solvay Pharmaceuticals and three generic drug makers of illegally agreeing to keep cheaper versions of a lucrative hormone-boosting drug off the market. The lawsuit alleges that Solvay agreed to share its profits with the generic firms, provided they did not launch their low-cost versions until 2015. The drug involved is Androgel, a gel-based testosterone drug, which is Solvay's best-selling product with U.S. sales over \$300 million. Instead of competing against Solvay, the FTC states that the generic companies agreed to

help market and manufacture Androgel. "These agreements deny consumers the opportunity to purchase lower-cost generic versions of Androgel, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year" states the FTC in its complaint, filed in a U.S. District Court in California. (National Community Pharmacy Association)

### ***Insurers Overcharged Medicare for Prescriptions, Report Finds***

Insurance companies involved in the Medicare prescription drug benefit (Part D) have overcharged subscribers and taxpayers by several billion dollars, according to the Inspector General for the Dept. of Health and Human Services. Eighty percent of the participating insurance companies owe the program an estimated \$4.4 billion for 2006 alone. "It shows a mindset that could (sic) care less about wasting taxpayer money, that has no problem with padding pockets of drug companies with hard-earned taxpayer dollars" said Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO). (ed.note) The screamingly obvious problem with the Medicare Part D mess is that the \$60 billion dollar program, which is paid for by monthly premiums deducted from beneficiaries Social Security checks, and further subsidized by Medicare (paid for by taxpayers), then pays the money to private insurance companies who eventually manage to keep almost 45% of the funds as "operating expenses" and over-inflated cost estimates, rather than distributing the money to pay pharmacies for prescriptions for beneficiaries as Congress intended President Obama has promised to lower the cost of medical care including prescription drugs. A good first step would be to limit the excessive profits being siphoned off by the insurance companies and ensure the providers of care are compensated fairly. (McClatchy Wash. Bureau and editor)

**The pharmacists and staff at M.D. Pharmacy, your neighborhood pharmacy.**