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***February, 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.***

### ***Medicare Insurers' Profits Exceed Expectations***

Health insurance companies that serve the elderly and disabled in Medicare are realizing significantly higher profits than even they anticipated, resulting in the companies profiting \$1.3 billion more than projected. If the companies had been more accurate in stating their anticipated expenses, they could have spent much of that \$1.3 billion on enhanced health benefits or lower monthly premiums, and they still would have maintained their expected profit margin, said the Government Accountability Office. "This puts to bed this idea the plans are offering tremendous extra benefits with the overpayments" said Rep. Pete Stark D-Cal, who requested the analysis. "The overpayments are going to profits", rather than toward more reasonable payments to health-care providers such as doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies, and enhanced benefits to patients. Ironically, as the insurer's coffers are filled to overflowing, the providers of care are seeing reduced reimbursements that threaten their ability to continue to serve their patients. Furthermore, supporters of the private insurance companies are threatening to implement further benefit cuts and higher premiums if any attempt is made to scale back payments to them. (Associated Press)

### ***Antidepressant Enhances Chemotherapy Drug***

Researchers in Israel say a popular antidepressant enhances the effect of an anticancer drug used with colon cancer. The Tel Aviv University study shows that the antidepressant fluoxetine (Prozac) regularly prescribed to ease the emotional pain of cancer patients also helps enhance the effect of the colon cancer drug doxorubicin by more than 1000 percent. Prozac worked to block the cancer drug from leaving the interior of the cancer cell and poisoning the healthy non-cancerous cells that surround it. "The good news is that the medical community won't have to wait—Prozac can be used for this purpose right away" said Dr. Dan Peer, the study leader. The publication Cancer Letters suggests that pairing Prozac with other chemotherapeutic drugs to curb resistance warrants further clinical study. (United Press International)

### ***Millions of Older Americans Use Risky Drug Combinations***

At least 2 million older Americans are taking a combination of drugs or supplements that can be a risky mix—from blood thinners and cholesterol pills to aspirin and ginkgo capsules. The results are not always disastrous, but older people are more vulnerable to drug-to-drug interactions. Patients need to know

that just because lots of medicines and supplements (especially those in so-called "health-food" stores, and on-line "pharmacies") don't require a prescription doesn't mean they're harmless. Nor are some of these safe to take with other prescribed medicines, such as garlic pills taken with warfarin (Coumadin), aspirin with warfarin, aspirin with ginkgo, lisinopril with potassium, cholesterol lowering statins taken with niacin, and literally thousands of other potentially dangerous combinations. The best take-home advice is to ask your doctor or pharmacist about any side-effects of your prescribed medicines, and tell them before taking other medicines. Some of these drugs are beneficial alone, but in combination with others can have high potential for harm if not monitored closely. (JAMA/Associated Press)

### ***Bone Drug Helps Chemo Fight Breast Cancer***

Doctors were stunned when they found that women receiving initial therapy with the drug, Zometa, for preventing bone loss due to cancer treatments, also had greater breast cancer tumor shrinkage and were less likely to need radical breast surgery. The drug also showed that it greatly cut the risk that cancer would recur in women who developed the disease before menopause. Cancer specialists are eagerly awaiting the final results of a second ongoing study testing Zometa in 3,360 women who had breast cancer after menopause—a much more common situation. Eleven percent of Zometa takers had a complete response to treatment—no evidence of cancer in breasts or lymph nodes—versus just 6 percent of women given chemo alone. "These results are surprising and deserve further testing" said Dr. E. Winer of Dana-Farber Cancer Center in Boston. Such benefits from the bone drug before surgery "is not something I would have expected". (Medscape Medical News)

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