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**Price Hikes on Drugs is On The Increase.**

Prices on a growing number of prescription medications have ballooned in recent years as consolidation in the drug industry leaves fewer companies manufacturing niche medications. Congressional investigators say the number of extraordinary price hikes on drugs doubled between 2000 and 2008. The Government Accountability Office report attributed the rise to a combination of factors, including price hikes by third-party providers, who repackage drugs for hospitals and doctors. The GAO's findings could put new pressure on drugmakers to contribute billions more to the health care reform effort. GAO found more than 400 examples of unusual price jumps on brand name drugs, ranging mostly from 100% to 499%, but several exceeded 1,000%. "It is hard to find a good-faith explanation for why drug prices could go up this much" said Sen. Charles Schumer, D-NY. The drug industry lobby says the investigation is based on "misleading data". *(Pharmacistelink)*

**Blood Pressure Drugs Might Fight Diabetic Retinopathy.**

New research in mice suggests that candesartan (*Atacand*), a drug known as an angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB), which is used to treat high blood-pressure, could prevent more than 70% of the proteins in the retina which are linked to diabetes from having abnormal changes which are linked to loss of vision. The findings, which come in the largest study of its kind, could spell hope for people who suffer from diabetic retinopathy or are at risk for it. *(Journal of Proteome Research)*

**Drug Benefit Expanded to 1 Million More Seniors.**

As of last January 1<sup>st</sup>, more than 1 million low-income seniors are newly eligible for more generous prescription drug benefits under the "extra help" program. Benefiting from a new law are those with life insurance policies and those who regularly get money from relatives to help pay household expenses, but were previously disqualified because of too many assets or too much income. Under the old law, applicants had to include the value of life insurance policies in calculating their assets. They also had to include as part of their income money received on a regular basis from relatives and friends to help meet expenses. The new income limits are \$16,245 a year for singles and \$21,855 for married couples living together. Assets such as stocks, bonds and bank accounts must be limited to \$12,510 for singles and \$25,010 for married couples. The value of homes and automobiles are now excluded. Seniors who were rejected for the program in the past are urged to reapply. Low-income seniors can apply for the program on-line at [socialsecurity.gov](http://socialsecurity.gov), or call 1-800-772-1213, or their local Social Security office. *(Pharmacistelink)*

**Expert: Pain Management Failing Millions.**

Millions with chronic pain are under-treated due to inadequate physician training, personal biases, or fear of drug abuse says a U.S. pharmaceutical expert. Adequate pain treatment is not a major part of most physicians' medical training. Even though they will often see a stream of patients with pain problems throughout their career, doctors may only get a few hours of education on the use of opioids in medical school. "We have more sophisticated pain management techniques available now than ever before, but many doctors are not fully informed about all the options available, and also often turn patients away because they are very concerned about the problems with prescription drug abuse" says Kathryn Hahn of the College of Pharmacy at Oregon State University. She suggests that doctors and nurses should accept that patients are the final arbiters of what is painful, believe them and work with them on their concerns. Also, individual patients should work and communicate patiently with their healthcare providers, not switch doctors arbitrarily, educate themselves if necessary, but be persistent in having their pain concerns taken seriously. Patients must acknowledge the seriousness of the prescription drug abuse issue and lock up their medications securely, literally in a home safe in some circumstances. The unlocked medicine cabinet is the foundation of a cottage industry of drug abuse in America today. Patients and doctors can benefit from working together to achieve better management of pain, its effect on quality of life issues, as well as preventing opioid abuse and misuse. *(Yellowbrix, Inc.)*

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