

April, 2010

Presenting your free monthly newsletter; Timely articles regarding your health-care. We welcome any questions or comments. Please share this with your friends and neighbors.

Medication Fears Lead to Worse Side Effects.

A new study offers some proof that patients who are worried about their medications are more likely to have side effects. The study involved patients with a particular kind of arthritis, but experts agree that this happens across a wide range of drugs. While most medication side effects are not life threatening or even harmful, doctors note that they can still be “frightening and distressing” to patients, and can lead to patients not taking drugs as prescribed. Those who had concerns about their medications, for example—agreeing with the statement that “having to take arthritis medications worries me”—were more likely to have reported having side effects, both at the study’s outset and if they started a new drug during the study period. Side effects typically included rashes, gastrointestinal discomfort, and headaches. Starting a new drug is an especially risky time since people tend to misattribute pre-existing bothersome but non-harmful symptoms as side effects of the new drug. *(Reuters)*

Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Spent \$6.3 Million Lobbying in Fourth Quarter 2009.

Big Pharma’s main trade group spent millions lobbying Congress, the White House, and multiple government agencies on health care provisions and related issues in just the fourth quarter of 2009. The group’s members include drug giants Pfizer, Merck, Johnson & Johnson and more than two dozen other drug companies. PhRMA lobbied against multiple aspects of the health care overhaul, including several bills to allow approval of generic versions of expensive biologic drugs. They also lobbied on several health care-related parts of the 2010 budget, as well as rules requiring research comparing the effectiveness of different drugs, payment issues involving Medicare and Medicaid, information disclosed in prescription drug package inserts, reform of patent laws, and concerns about gifts and “consulting fees” paid to doctors, posing a strong conflict of interest. *(Associated Press)*

Alternative to Statins Shows Promise.

A thyroid-derived cholesterol-lowering drug that could be an alternative to the widely used statin drugs has done well in a small early trial. In the trial, the new drug was added to statin treatment for 168 people whose high levels of LDL cholesterol had not been lowered by previous use of statins alone. The combination lowered LDL levels, and did not cause the feared side effects on the heart and other organs that have plagued similar thyroid-based treatments. A professor of endocrinology at Johns Hopkins said “There was no doubt that the drug (eprotirome) would lower LDL cholesterol. Thyroid hormone is nature’s own statin”. An alternative to statins would be welcome, as statins are not effective in up to a quarter of potential patients. *(Health Day)*

Why US Healthcare Costs Are Out of Control.

The following factors were cited by two physicians as the reasons US healthcare costs are out of control. These are some of the dollar wasting examples that they have both observed.

The Building of “Shrines” for Hospital Administrators. The building of expensive and unneeded new healthcare facilities to satisfy the desire of an institution to provide a monument to honor a hospital executive who is nearing the end of his/her career.

Unnecessary Duplication of Services. An unneeded and expensive transplant program was built to enhance the image and prestige of a university hospital, even though the city already had three excellent facilities in place.

Absence of Medical Malpractice Tort Reform. Abuses of medical costs are rampant because the legal system depends on contingency payments to trial lawyers and “hired gun” expert witnesses who are paid handsomely for their biased opinions.

The Need for Hospitals to Be in the Black. Hospitals operating at a deficit need to admit enough insured and paying patients to maintain their income stream, placing tremendous pressures on physicians and surgeons to increase hospital admissions.

Decreased Physician Reimbursement Leading to Unnecessary Procedures. Physicians who do procedures are no longer paid on the basis of skill and quality, but on the number of procedures performed.

Pay-for-Performance Systems. Financial incentives have been introduced to provide additional income to physicians who will perform certain procedures with lower risk of mortality and morbidity rates. *(Associated Press)*

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

April, 2010