

2019

## Wellness Through Answers News v.34:no.5 September-October 2019

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### Recommended Citation

Urciuoli, Wendy, "Wellness Through Answers News v.34:no.5 September-October 2019" (2019). *Articles - Patient Care*. 120.

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## Wellness Through Answers News

September/October 2019

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to  
Reliable Health Information*

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### **New Name**

The name "HealthNet" is no longer used by our library's consumer health information service. Our service is now called "Wellness Through Answers." To be consistent, we have renamed our newsletter, too. Although our name has changed, our focus remains the same: linking you to reliable health information.

### **Have a Personal Health Question?**

*Wellness Through Answers* staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our

service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / [hnet@uchc.edu](mailto:hnet@uchc.edu)

### **Medical Mistreatment of Pregnant Women Common in the U.S.**

One out of six pregnant women who deliver in U.S. hospitals is mistreated by medical professionals. This figure is even higher for African American women. Being yelled at, scolded, ignored, or refused help were the most common types of mistreatment. Women also reported: physical privacy violation, being forced into a procedure, threatened with having treatment withheld, refused anesthesia for an episiotomy, or sharing private information without a woman's consent. In the worst cases, mistreatment resulted in preventable death or serious harm. Researchers blame mistreatment of African American women on myths arising from Pre-Civil War scientific theories that non-white races were a different and inferior species. Some of these myths, including the idea that dark-skinned women feel less pain, still influence the training of medical students.

### **Growing Old but Not Frail**

Is slowing down a normal part of aging? Older adults who have low levels of physical activity, low energy, and walk very slowly may actually have a serious medical condition known as frailty. Being frail raises the risk of infection, illnesses that require hospitalization, and surgical complications. Although one in four adults over age 84 is frail, frailty is not a normal part of aging and can be prevented or reversed.

Avoiding frailty requires strengthening muscle and bone through a healthy diet with adequate protein, exercise, and resistance training. Making these lifestyle changes may be hard. The following programs can help.

- The National Institute on Aging's "Go4Life" program offers tips for increasing physical activity, videos of exercises to increase strength and flexibility, and workout worksheets to track progress
- Many Medicare plans offer adults over 65 free gym memberships through the "Silver Sneakers" program
- A registered dietician can review your diet and help you design an eating plan that supports strong muscles and bones

Older adults should also review their medications with their primary care doctor or a pharmacist. Some medications taken for chronic health conditions can

reduce lean muscle mass and increase the risk of falls.

### **Revised Beers List Guides Safe Drug Choices for Older Adults**

The "Beers List" (also known as the "Beers Criteria") is the leading source of information about safely prescribing drugs for older adults. Physicians use this tool to ensure that a drug's side effects do not outweigh its benefits to their patients over 65. Older adults are at increased risk for complications resulting from drug side effects because drugs act differently in their bodies, and they are more likely to be taking multiple medications for ongoing health conditions.

The Beers List flags drugs that may be inappropriate for older adults. Drugs appear on this list because they:

- have a higher risk of side effects
- may not work as well in older bodies
- may worsen specific diseases
- may cause harmful drug-drug interactions
- may cause problems for people with reduced kidney function

The Beers List is published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. Information about taking drugs safely is available on the Society's "HealthyAging.org" website.

### **Planned Parenthood App Expands Access to Reproductive Health Care**

The "Planned Parenthood Direct" app makes it easier for individuals to obtain birth control and treatment for urinary tract infections. App users can have birth control pills sent to their homes and prescriptions for urinary tract infections delivered to their pharmacy. The app also offers reliable information about birth control options and allows users to schedule appointments at Planned Parenthood health centers. Currently, the app is available in 27 states including Connecticut. The organization plans to expand the app to all 50 states by the end of 2020. Planned Parenthood Direct is free and available for download in the App Store or on Google Play.

### **YouTube Makes Money off Phony Cancer Cures**

BBC reporters uncovered 80 YouTube videos in English and other languages featuring misleading health information, mostly unproven cancer cures. Cancer remedies included turmeric, baking soda, juice diets, and extreme fasting. According to a BBC, none of the videos offered scientific evidence that the remedies actually work. More disturbing than fake cures, however, were the advertisements for big brand companies like Samsung, Heinz, and Clinique that preceded the videos.

Juice diets sound silly, but they could be harmful if desperate patients use them instead of potentially life-saving conventional medical treatments.

### **Prescriptions Filled in the Produce Aisle**

New York City's "Pharmacy to Farm Prescriptions Program" is one example of how nonprofits, healthcare groups, and insurers are improving access to healthy fruits and vegetables to help patients get healthier. These programs give families and individuals vouchers to purchase produce at local grocery stores and farmer's markets. Some programs require attendance at nutrition classes before vouchers are distributed.

The hope is that consistent access to nutritious food will lower healthcare costs. One major health care organization, Geisinger Health System, already has data demonstrating a return on their investment. Patients participating in Geisinger's produce prescription program improved blood sugar control, weight loss, cholesterol, and hypertension.

### **Black Market Drug Sellers Target Immigrants**

In communities across the U.S., immigrants are turning to the black market to purchase their medications. Black market drugs can be purchased at swap meets, beauty parlors, and outside neighborhood grocery stores. Immigrants turn to the black market because they can not afford traditional doctors and legitimate pharmacies, and because they fear deportation. Unbeknownst to immigrants, these black market drugs are counterfeit. These drugs may contain too little or too much of an active ingredient or may be contaminated with harmful substances. Sadly, local police departments do not have the resources to go after black market sellers, and the Food and Drug Administration traps less than one percent of counterfeit drugs.

## Are Your Health Data and Medical Images Secure?

The internet makes it possible for doctors to quickly share medical data and images like X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans. Unfortunately, some of the servers on which medical data and images are stored are not secure and can easily be hacked into with freely available software.

Investigative journalists from ProPublica teamed up with a German broadcaster to see how widespread this problem is. They identified 187 computer servers in the U.S. that were unprotected by passwords or basic security precautions. These servers stored the medical records of over 5 million patients. In most cases, responsibility for the servers was traced to independent radiologists, medical imaging centers and archiving services.

How can patients protect their medical data? They can ask their doctor if access to their information requires a login and password. Patients can also ask whether the imaging center conducts a regular security assessment as required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

## Health Effects of Climate Change

When we think about climate change, we often think of intense heat, hurricanes, and flooding. Extreme weather and heat also affect our health in many ways. An article in *The Guardian* newspaper found health effects across every medical specialty. Citing research in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Guardian* listed the following health problems:

- Seasonal allergies now span the whole year and are more severe
- Premature births, low-birth weights, and stillbirths have increased
- Worsening pollution due to fossil fuels and forest fires have increased hospitalizations and deaths due to heart disease
- Air pollution has been linked to increased asthma attacks and breathing problems
- Severe weather events traumatize children and disrupt their medical care
- Extreme heat increases dehydration which is linked to kidney stones and kidney failure
- Higher temperatures are linked to increased risk of skin cancer, digestive illnesses, the spread of infectious diseases, mental health crises, stroke, and nutritional deficiencies

### More Health News You Can Use:

Are coupons for MRIs a good deal?

Free or low-cost health services for seniors

An app that can save your life

GrandPad® a simple tablet designed for seniors

How many books could you read if you quit social media?

How to get paid as a family caregiver

Forty iOS apps for students with visual impairments

Not your grandpa's hearing aids

Traveling abroad with prescription drugs

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