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Wellness Through Answers News

November/December 2019

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

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

Unexpected Side Effect of Deep Brain Stimulation

Do you know someone who received a brain implant for Parkinson's disease? If so, volunteer to be their swim buddy. The implanted electrodes turn off the ability to swim. A [new report](#) details nine cases of patients, all proficient swimmers, who could no longer swim after implant surgery. In one case, the individual was a competitive swimmer who regularly raced across Lake Zurich! When the implants were shut off, patients could swim again, but their motor symptoms quickly worsened.

Brain implants have become the "[standard-of-care](#)" for Parkinson's patients whose tremors and unwanted movements no longer respond to drug therapy. The implant sends electrical signals directly to the neurons responsible for movement. Research is underway to determine why this happens. In the meantime, Parkinson's patients should be cautious when swimming and not swim alone.

Technology Trouble in Older Adults Could Signal Early Dementia

An older adult who can't remember passwords, or complains they can't figure out their smartphone may be showing early signs of dementia. Computer skills, as [researchers have discovered](#), may deteriorate before the more classic hallmarks of early dementia, like misplacing items or forgetting names, are observed. Owning a smartphone and driving a car give older adults independence. Children may be faced with the difficult decision to take internet access away from their older parents or blocking their online access to bank accounts and email to protect them from scammers.

Ways to Save on Prescription Drugs

The rising cost of prescription drugs is a big concern for people across the United States. [From 2008 to 2016](#), oral prescription drugs prices increased nine percent annually, while injectable prescription drugs increased 15% annually.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, almost **one in four** Americans did not fill a prescription last year due to high drug costs.

Here are ten ways consumers can save on prescription drugs:

- Look for retailers with "**\$4 generics**" programs
- Shop at **stores that offer free antibiotics** with a prescription
- Comparison shop using websites like **GoodRx** or **RetailMeNot Rx Saver**
- Use your employer's mail-order pharmacy program
- Shop at **Costco** even if you are not a member
- Check manufacturer websites for rebates
- Buy drugs from a **vetted online pharmacy**
- **Split pills** when possible
- Apply to "**The Assistance Fund**" for copay help for life-saving medications
- Request access to experimental, life-saving drugs through the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) "Expanded Access" or "**Compassionate Use**" program.

Dangerous Drugs at Discount Stores

Trying to save money on your medications? Don't buy them at a "Dollar Tree" store. According to the **Food and Drug Administration** (FDA), Dollar Tree has been selling drugs made by companies with poor safety records. The discount chain was found to be selling drugs from manufacturers with serious safety violations like failure to test raw materials, falsifying test results, and marketing contaminated or sub-potent drugs.

Falsified Drug Manufacturing Records Endanger Patients

Drug plants in China and India have been **falsifying records** and manipulating data in order to pass FDA-required safety inspections. STAT, an investigative journalism group, spent over five years analyzing the FDA's own inspection records for drug manufacturers in China, India, Europe, and the United States. Although U.S. and European plants do violate rules around data and record-keeping, Chinese and Indian companies had **significantly more violations**, many affecting the quality of the drugs they produce. Their bad practices included deleting irregular test results, discarding raw data, and faking data in their batch production records so that a drug could be released for consumption.

How can consumers tell where their generic drugs are manufactured?

According to the website **PharmacyChecker**, although drug companies are not

required to list this information, it can sometimes be found on the drug label. The National Library of Medicine's website [DailyMed](#) includes photos of drug labels. If you click on the label and enlarge it, you may find the country in which your medication was manufactured.

Do Women Really Need 3-D Mammograms?

TV commercials featuring female celebrities encourage women to "demand the better mammogram." But when it comes to breast cancer screening, are 3-D mammograms better than conventional 2-D ones? According to the **US Preventive Services Task Force**, an independent, volunteer panel of experts in disease prevention, the evidence is inconclusive. Manufacturers of 3-D machines have mounted a BIG marketing campaign to change our minds.

According to a *Kaiser Health News* investigation, manufacturers have spent **millions of dollars** on influential physicians at teaching hospitals, direct-to-patient advertising, lawmakers, medical experts, and patient advocacy groups. **Physicians** who received money from manufacturers subsequently published positive articles in influential medical journals. Machine manufacturers also heavily lobbied private insurers. As a result, insurers in **16 states** are now legally required to cover 3-D breast screening, and Medicaid programs in **36 states and the District of Columbia** are also required to cover them.

Doctor Bias Leads to Misdiagnoses

Everyone has unconscious stereotypes or cultural assumptions that affect our judgment and may lead us to incorrect conclusions. When doctors allow biases to affect their decisions, patients may be misdiagnosed and receive treatments that in some cases is harmful. One study estimates that **12 million Americans are misdiagnosed annually**.

Doctors who are trained to identify symptoms only as they appear in white men may dismiss women with the same health problem. Black Americans with severe depression are **four to nine times more likely** to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than white Americans with the same symptoms. Bias around mental illness is particularly troublesome. Doctors treating patients with mental illness may miss a medical condition. Their patient's new complaint of chest pain, for example, might be attributed to depression or anxiety rather than to a heart problem.

Here are things patients can do to prevent misdiagnoses:

- bring your medical records to your appointment
- speak up if you are unhappy with your diagnosis
- ask - could my symptoms be caused by another illness?

Pre-disease? What Does That Mean?

What does it mean if you are told you have pre-diabetes or pre-hypertension? A pre-disease means you are at risk of developing a disease. Your test results were higher than normal, but not high enough to meet the threshold for the disease. Not everyone with a pre-disease goes on to develop the disease. For example, the [annual risk](#) of developing diabetes from pre-diabetes is two percent.

According to an [article](#) in *Consumer Reports*, the majority of people with a pre-disease diagnosis never go on to develop serious health problems. [Lifestyle changes](#) like improving diet, losing weight, getting more exercise, or stopping smoking are enough to reverse a pre-disease condition. Although medications may prevent people with pre-disease conditions from developing the disease, they are not without risks.

More Health News You Can Use:

How [safe](#) is your hospital?

[Virtual reality](#) enters labor and delivery rooms

[Borrow a bike](#) with your library card

[Help to pay](#) for senior eye exams

[Bionic eye](#) enables blind to "see"

[Springfield MA](#) is the best place in the US to grow old

[Waste less time](#) on social media

[Don't wash the turkey](#) before roasting!

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[UConn Health Nondiscrimination Policy](#)