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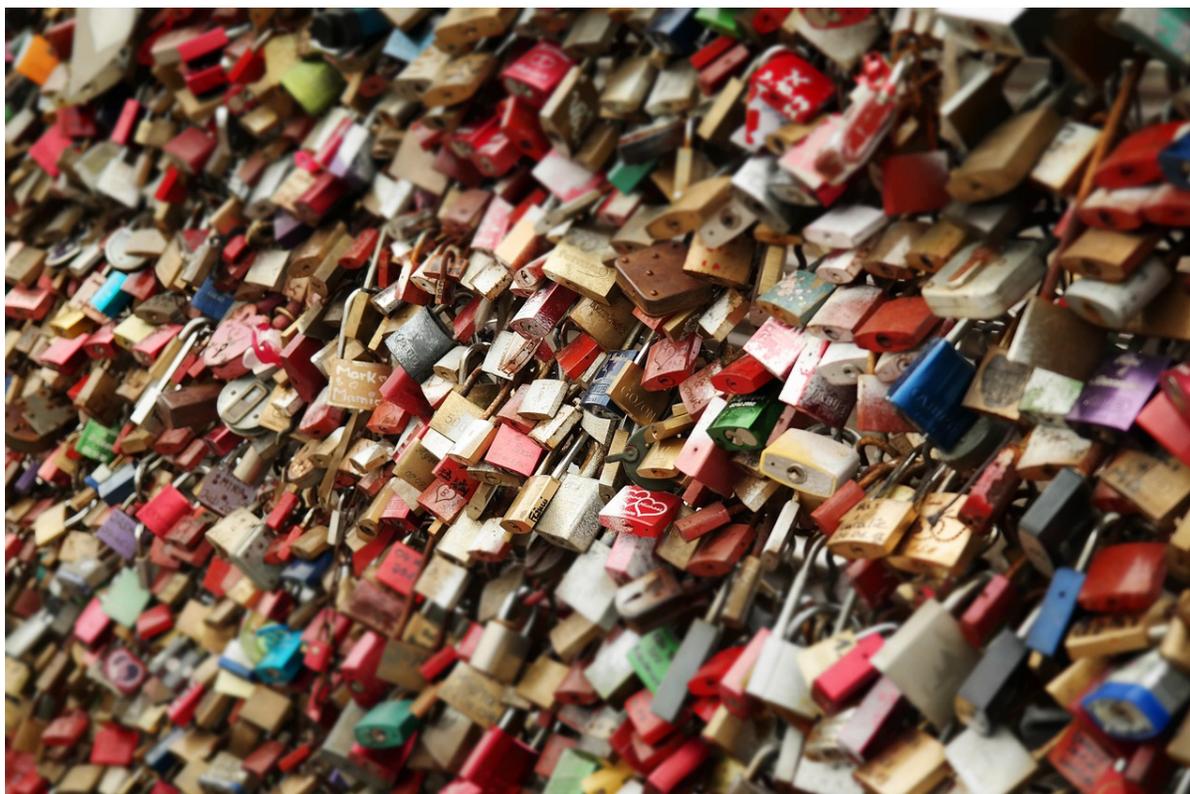


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Wellness Through Answers News

January/February 2020

*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

Pharmacists Call Out Unsafe Work Practices at Chain Pharmacies

Pharmacists at chain drug stores say inadequate staffing, long hours, unreasonable performance metrics and work quotas threaten the public's safety. In addition to filling prescriptions and counseling patients, pharmacists must also tend the drive-through, work the register, give flu shots, and call doctors and insurance companies. Bonuses and reprimands are tied to performance measures, like how long it takes to fill a prescription or how many immunizations are given. Pharmacists are also pressured to get doctors to agree to 90-day prescriptions, even when medication will only be needed for a short period of time. Psychiatrists, in particular, argue that 90-day refills could provide suicidal patients with enough medication to overdose. Pharmacists fear their work conditions will cause drug errors which often go unnoticed because **many state pharmacy boards** do not require pharmacies to report them.

How can you protect yourself from drug errors? First, carefully examine your prescription to make sure you are getting the right dose of the right drug. Second, make sure *your name* appears on the pill bottle label. Third, if the medication looks different, use the online pill identifier tool on the **Pillbox** or **Drugs.com** to confirm your prescription is accurate.

Mammography Reports to Include Breast Density Information

Next year, when a woman gets her screening mammogram, she will receive information about her breast density. The federal "**breast density notification law**" requires imaging facilities to include breast density information in reports for patients and doctors. Why is the new law important?

Dense breast tissue makes it difficult to find cancer. Both tumors and dense tissue appear white on a mammogram. Breast cancer hidden on mammography may not be detected until the tumor is larger and more likely to have spread. **Forty percent of women** over the age of 40 have some dense breast tissue and **ten percent have extremely dense tissue**. Women with extremely dense tissue are **four-to-six times more likely** to develop breast cancer. The nonprofit website [Dense Breast-Info.org](http://DenseBreast-Info.org), recommends women with dense breasts add a screening ultrasound to their mammogram.

Doctor Dogs

Healthcare is creating many new roles for dogs because of their acute sense of smell. Dogs can sniff in *parts per trillion*. Author Maria Goodavage says a dog's nose is so sensitive it could *detect a tablespoon of sugar* in a volume of water equal to two Olympic-size swimming pools. Goodavage is the author of the book *Doctor Dogs: How Our Best Friends Are Becoming Our Best Medicine*. She visited health programs around the world that use trained dogs. Some of the specialized jobs dogs perform included identifying patients with ovarian cancer, alerting people with diabetes when their blood sugar was too high or too low, and sniffing out the superbug, C. difficile, before it could infect hospitalized patients.

Hospitals Fight Drug Shortages by Making Critical Drugs Themselves

Shortages of critical drugs like antibiotics, pain medications and cancer drugs disrupt patient care and cost hospitals about *\$600 million a year*. Rather than pay for costly alternatives, substitute inferior drugs, or delay treatment, seven hospital systems partnered with three philanthropies and created a nonprofit, CivicaRx, to make the drugs they need. CivicaRx is already shipping drugs to over *1,200 U.S. hospitals*. Currently, it is approved to produce *18 drugs*. The company plans to make and seek approval for another *80 drugs*.

Are Stimulant Prescriptions Tied to Drug Company Spending on Doctors?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is often treated with prescription stimulants like Concerta or Ritalin. A *five-year study of drug company spending* on doctors found as spending increased, so did prescriptions for stimulants. Spending usually took the form of free meals and drinks. Pediatricians were most frequently targeted, followed by psychiatrists. The most heavily promoted stimulant, Vyvanse was also the most expensive stimulant and had no generic equivalent.

Research has shown *free meals for doctors* can influence their prescribing behavior. Increased prescribing of stimulants for children is worrisome because:

- stimulants prescribed for children *often end up with others* who use the drugs for non-medical purposes

- prescription **drug misuse commonly begins** during adolescence or young adulthood

If you are wondering whether stimulants are right for your child, check out [HelpGuide.org's](#) report on ADHD medications. **The report** covers safety concerns, questions to ask the ADHD specialist, and how to talk to your child about taking stimulants responsibly.

South Dakota Lawmakers Want to Criminalize Drug Treatments for Transgender Teens

In South Dakota, **a proposed law would ban** hormone therapy and puberty-blocking drugs for children younger than 16. Doctors prescribe these drugs to transgender children who suffer from gender dysphoria. If this law passes, doctors prescribing these drugs will be treated as criminals.

Doctors argue these drugs save lives. The drugs help to control depression and anxiety and reduce suicidal behavior. A **recent survey** of transgender teens found **over 50% of male teens** reported attempting suicide in their lifetime, while **30% of transgender female teens** said they attempted suicide.

Competency Testing for Older Doctors

Under the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration rules, **commercial pilots must retire at 65**. Unlike pilots, however, there is no national mandatory retirement age for doctors. Twenty thousand **U.S. doctors turn 65** every year yet many continue to practice. Although many hospitals screen older doctors for mental sharpness and physical abilities, age-based screening is controversial.

One hospital which uses age-based screening to re-credential doctors reported **13% of doctors 70 and older** had cognitive problems that affected their ability to practice independently. None of these doctors, however, had been reported for performance problems.

Age-based screening is an inexact science and false positives are common. Screening could result in the loss of competent doctors practicing in under-served areas. Age-based screening also diminishes the value of the cumulative wisdom and experience of older doctors.

Look for the Silver Lining

Research has shown that people who are strongly optimistic are healthier than their pessimistic peers. Optimistic people are more likely to exercise and eat well, and less likely to smoke. How can you cultivate optimism?

Tara Parker-Pope, editor of the New York Times consumer health website, Well, offers these **tips for becoming more optimistic**:

- Surround yourself with positive people
- Look for the silver lining in bad situations
- Minimize your exposure to negative news
- Keep a daily gratitude journal
- Meditate
- Respond to setbacks with a positive affirmation like "I'm a problem solver. I'll figure this out."

No More Lead Aprons for X-Rays

Some hospitals are no longer covering patient torsos with lead aprons during X-ray imaging exams. Why? There is **no scientific evidence** to support this practice, and shielding patients with lead aprons might actually increase their exposure to radiation.

The American Association of Physicists in Medicine and the American College of Radiology **recommend routine shielding** of patients be discontinued. Why?

- Lead aprons are hard to position and often miss the target area they are supposed to protect.
- Shielding can hide areas of the body the doctor needs to see and necessitate repeat X-rays.
- Shielding causes automatic exposure controls on imaging equipment to increase radiation to parts of the body being examined because the machine is trying to see through the lead apron.
- Aprons don't protect against radiation scatter which happens when radiation ricochets inside the body.

The National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements is expected to release a statement next year recommending the discontinuation of routine shielding for X-rays.

Help for Treating Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression (PPD) affects **one in nine new moms**. Few moms with PPD however, are identified and treated for depression. Surprisingly, obstetricians (OBs) who are the first doctors women see after childbirth, do not receive training in treating PPD.

In Massachusetts, help for OBs with PPD patients is only a phone call away. MCPAP (Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program for Moms) runs a **helpline for health professionals** in obstetrics practices. A physician, nurse practitioner, or midwife can call MCPAP and speak to a psychiatrist about a treatment plan for their PPD patient. **Seventy-four percent** of obstetric practices in Massachusetts have enrolled in MCAP.

More Health News You Can Use

Sheet-pan dinners for busy families

More Americans are lonely

New Barbie Dolls promote diversity

Fitbit predicts flu outbreaks

Braille tablet provides real-time access to news

How to pack a **"go bag"** for extended hospital stays

Decluttering? What to do with **sentimental items**

New norms for developmental milestones_

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