



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
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"Drug Cost Concerns In 2012 America"

Half of the American population is on prescription medications. Prescription drugs can be vital in the prevention and treatment of illness but anything can be taken to dangerous extremes. Reportedly, last year over 4 billion pills were dispensed to a population of 330 million people. Many patients are taking multiple pills, with some taking dozens on a daily basis. Polypharmacy (taking multiple drugs) is pandemic in America. Television is saturated with drug advertisements, which have been run past focus groups, psychologists, marketers, etc. to get the best marketing bang for their buck. They are designed to get the viewing patient to request them from their doctor....and it works. On Dr. Oz's TV show, a man said his wife has him taking 22 supplement pills daily. Drug sales are sky rocketing, with sales in 2009 exceeding \$300 billion. Sales have climbed steadily since the 1990's, usually with double digit annual growth. Yet, together, health plan denials and patient abandonment resulted in 14.4% of all new, commercial plan prescriptions going unfilled in 2009, up 5.5% from 2008. A 2009 study found that the cost of drug-related morbidity, including poor adherence (not taking medication as prescribed by doctors) and suboptimal prescribing, drug administration, and diagnosis, is estimated to be as much as \$289 billion annually, about 13% of total health care expenditures. The barriers to medication adherence are many: cost, side effects, the difficulty of managing multiple prescriptions, patients' understanding of their disease, forgetfulness, cultural and belief systems, imperfect drug regimens, patients' ability to navigate the health care system, cognitive impairments, and a reduced sense of urgency due to asymptomatic conditions. Drug spending is reduced when there is competition from new, lower cost generic substitutes. The average generic price falls to 20% of the branded price and lower. Almost 80% of FDA-approved drugs have generic counterparts. Advertising dramatically influences sales and manufacturer spending on advertising was over 1.5 times as much in 2009 (\$10.9 billion) as in 1999 (\$6.6 billion). Bills had been introduced in the 111th Congress addressing changes to prescription advertising rules, particularly as they relate to on-line advertising. Drug manufacturers remain among the nation's most profitable businesses. A variety of public and private strategies have been implemented in attempts to contain rising costs for prescription drugs. But for now, the sky is the limit. HHS projects US prescription drug spending to increase from \$234.1 billion in 2008 to \$457.8 billion in 2019, almost doubling over the 11-year period.

In the America that I love, we must also remember the greater cost of FDA approved drugs as the cause of the 106,000 plus deaths each year from adverse reactions to medicines. Also, please use caution when combining supplements with powerful drugs.

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