



# Taking Control of Your Health

A Monthly Newsletter from Antonella Martino, January 2017

## High drug costs: The other side of the coin

By Jason Poquette

The uncontrolled inflation of some prescription prices, particularly for certain generics that have been in the market for years, is a sad story to be sure.

As someone who works on the front lines of pharmacy, I see and feel the impact of these escalating costs all the time. And there is no doubt the proliferation of specialty drugs will continue to put pressure on payers and patients, resulting in higher premiums and escalating healthcare costs.

However, consider the other side of the coin, the price of many products has gone down. In fact, I would argue that the pharmacy industry, more than any other healthcare profession, has worked to drive down costs in numerous ways that should never be forgotten. Consider these three factors specifically:



### 1. Inexpensive generics

Everyone talks about the high price of a few generics: few remember that tens of thousands of generic prescription drugs are dispensed every day for less than a fancy cup of coffee: tablets for blood pressure, cholesterol, pain, infection and mental health are virtually given away by pharmacies for \$4 or \$5 for a month's supply, even without insurance.

Pharmacists interpret, fill, label and review prescriptions, then package and ring them up for pennies per pill. What other branch of our healthcare system has worked to provide so much for so little? Doctors? Hospitals? Surgeons? Labs?

When is the last time you arrived at the physician's office and were handed a \$4 list of services?

### 2. Transparency

You won't find a more transparent branch of our healthcare system than retail pharmacy. You can find out the full price of your prescription, to the penny, and easily shop around before paying. Nobody goes home from the pharmacy wondering what the bill for their medications will be. Does this happen in the rest of our healthcare system? Want to shop around for the best MRI price? Good luck! How about comparing the price of a well visit, a trip to the ER or the cost of that panel of labs that the doctor just ordered?

Patients are blinded from these costs, and the system is designed to keep us in the dark. And it is this lack of transparency that plays a significant role in driving up costs. Pharmacy, once again, is the exception to this rule.

### 3. Over-The-Counter (OTC) medications

The same journalists and media pundits who are blasting away at the "high prices" the "greed" of pharmaceutical companies do so while popping an OTC *omeprazole* for their acid reflux and an aspirin for their headache – without having to see a doctor. While writing their diatribes against pharmacy prices, they enjoy all of the benefits of an inexpensive OTC antihistamine that keeps them from sneezing on their work.

## How Patient Engagement, Education Can Improve Medication Safety

By Sara Heath

Strong client engagement and education strategies may be useful for improving medication safety, according to a recent ONC report.

First, the researchers recommended clinicians provide clients with **after-visit summaries**, including detailed medication lists.

Offering after-visit summaries can add another layer to the many checks providers should conduct to ensure they have prescribed the appropriate medication to the correct client. When clients have the opportunity to read which medications they are taking, they may detect an error another clinician had missed.

Because patients may not understand these materials and so may not be successful in catching medication errors, the research recommended bolstering patient education through a **teach-back strategy**. It's simple, patients are asked to explain, or "teach-back" the important concepts covered during the visit, thus checking their understanding.

According to researchers, this also empowers patients to ask follow-up questions regarding their medications and the diagnosis.

## Breathing-based yoga may help treat major depression

By Honor Whiteman

Antidepressant medication is considered a primary treatment for major depression, but the drugs fail to fully work for more than half of Americans who use them. Now, researchers suggest a way to boost their effectiveness: breathing-based yoga.

In a pilot study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, researchers reveal how 8 weeks of

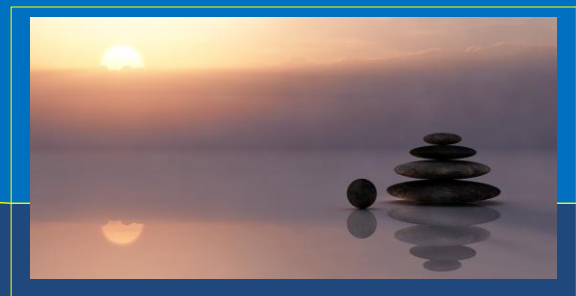
**Sudarshan Kriya yoga** improved symptoms of anxiety and depression in patients with major depressive disorder (MDD) who were not responding to antidepressants.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, depression is the most common mental illness in the United States. In 2014, around 15.7 million adults experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past 12 months.

Symptoms of depression may include persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt or worthlessness, fatigue, loss of interest in activities, reduced appetite, weight loss, and insomnia.

An individual is usually diagnosed with MDD if they experience at least five of these symptoms for at least 2 weeks, and such depressive episodes may commonly occur after a traumatic event, such as the death of a loved one or a medical illness.

Antidepressants - such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) - are often the first port of call when it comes to treatment for MDD, but patients do not always respond to the drugs. While additional medication may be offered, this can lead to unpleasant side effects that cause patients to stop treatment completely, making relapses more likely.



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