

In Touch

Keeping you In Touch
with what's happening
in the world of
Health Care

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■ Chiropractic care reduces X-rays, surgeries

A study in the October 11, 2004 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* reports that low back pain patients with chiropractic coverage in their insurance plan needed less surgery and fewer X-rays than patients on the same insurance plan without chiropractic coverage.

In the largest study of its type, four years of back pain claims were examined. 700,000 insured patients with chiropractic coverage were compared with 1,000,000 insured members without chiropractic coverage. Other than the chiropractic coverage, both groups of patients were on the same insurance plan.

By comparing the two groups, the study found that:

- Chiropractic care cut the overall cost of back pain care by 28%.
- Chiropractic care reduced the cost of X-rays and MRIs by 37%.
- Chiropractic care reduced back pain patient hospitalizations by 41%.
- Chiropractic care reduced the number of back surgeries by 32%.

Dr. Douglas Metz, chief health services officer at American Specialty Health, the insurer that sponsored the study said, "No matter how we perform the analysis – whether we look at total costs to the health plan, at lower back pain care, at musculoskeletal care – in each data set, the population covered for chiropractic had a lower overall cost to the health plan than the population without access to chiropractic benefits."

Although this study did not examine patient satisfaction, Metz says that other company studies show that 95% of chiropractic patients are satisfied with the care they receive.

Commentary: It always comes down to "try the simple things first" doesn't it? The simple, yet effective process of restoring and maintaining proper body function through lifetime chiropractic care should be a major component of everyone's health plan. ▲

■ 1/3 of Americans may have experienced medical errors

On November 17, 2004, a study reported by *WebMD Medical News* says that a third of Americans say that they or a family member have experienced preventable medical mistakes, many of which led to severe pain, disability and death.

The study was a national survey of more than 2000 adults conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, the U.S. Agency for Health Care Research and Quality and the Harvard School of Public Health.

In a 1999 Institute of Medicine report, experts claimed that medical errors cause upwards of 98,000 deaths per year. Many of those same experts have expressed concern that improvements in the system have been slow to come.

In this latest survey:

- 40% of the respondents believe that the quality of U.S. health care has declined in recent years.
- 55% said they were dissatisfied with the overall quality of their care.
- 52% of patients say they are "worried" or "somewhat worried" about the quality of health care they or their families receive.

–continued

"If you cry "Forward," you must make plain in what direction to go."

–Anton Chekov

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- More than 20% of those who have experienced their own or a family member's medical errors say that the mistakes caused serious consequences.
 - 16% said the mistake caused severe pain or significant lost time at work.
 - 8% said the error caused death.
- Only 17% of those surveyed said the quality of their health care has improved.

Nearly all of the patients surveyed said hospitals should be required to report medical errors and 63% said that the information should be made public.

Commentary: Sadly, hospitals have resisted public reporting of error occurrences, fearing (rightly so in our humble opinion) that it would unleash a torrent of lawsuits and negative publicity. Since the problem has continued unabated since first reported in 1999, it would appear that rather than resolve the preventable medical error problem, hospitals are simply pushing to keep them a secret from the people they serve.

They call it Health Care. We don't consider it healthy or caring. ▲

■ Cholesterol drug Crestor may damage kidneys

Reuters reports on October 29, 2004 that the U.S. consumer group Public Citizen has called for a ban on the anti-cholesterol statin drug Crestor after 29 patients who took it have developed kidney damage.

According to Public Citizen's analysis, there are 6.4 reports of kidney damage or failure for every 1 million Crestor prescriptions filled. Public Citizen figures this to be about 75 times higher than all the anti-cholesterol statin drugs combined.

Dr. Sidney Wolfe, head of Public Citizen's Health Research Group told the Food and Drug Administration that "it becomes clearer by the day that this drug is uniquely toxic without offering any

unique benefit, and that it must be removed from the market."

Public Citizen points out that anti-cholesterol statin drugs have come under fire in the past. In 2001, another statin drug, Baycol, was removed from the market after it was found to cause a form of severe muscle damage. Baycol was linked to more than 100 deaths. ▲

■ Acid suppression drugs increase pneumonia risk

The October 27, 2004 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that people who take acid suppression drugs are much more likely to develop pneumonia than those who don't use the drugs.

The findings apply to proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) such as Prevacid and Nexium as well as H2-receptor antagonists such as Zantac and Pepcid.

In those people currently taking the drugs, the incidence rate of pneumonia was 2.45 per 100 persons per year. The rate in those who were not taking the drugs was 0.6 per 100 persons per year.

After taking into account various factors, the researchers estimated the risk of pneumonia was 89% higher for those people taking PPIs and 63% higher for people taking the H2-receptor antagonists.

In a related editorial, Dr. James Gregor of the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada reminded doctors that "concerns for patient safety should guide initial prescribing and perhaps more importantly, chronic use of even the most apparently benign drugs." ▲

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