

Pharmacy Benefit News

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Specialty Spotlight

The Movement Towards Value-Based Care

In 2011, CareFirst launched its' patient-centered medical home model, which aimed to offer better health care to patients by reimbursing physicians based on improved outcomes and reductions in costs. This fee-for-value model has demonstrated significant savings for the company and those it insures, reporting, "Health care costs for those participating in CareFirst's program were \$345 million less than projected in 2014." The program has also seen success in improving clinical outcomes, noting "19 percent fewer hospital admissions, 20 percent fewer hospital readmissions, and 5 percent fewer outpatient health facility visits." These findings have encouraged many health providers to launch similar programs.

Cohn M. CareFirst finds savings in 'patient-centered' health care model.' *The Baltimore Sun*. 30 July 2015. Accessed from <http://www.baltimoresun.com/health/health-care/bs-hs-carefirst-savings-20150730-story.html>.

Comment:

As more health plans move away from fee-for-service towards fee-for-value, new challenges emerge. How do we define "value" when discussing quality of care? Differing interpretations of the definition of quality may lead to significant variation as to how it is measured. Therefore, implementing this method of value-based reimbursements will require standardization for measuring clinical and financial outcomes across the different providers. Certainly, NCQA HEDIS measures as well as URAC measures provide one approach to quality measurement. However, how do we rate practices that treat unpredictable and expensive disease states, like cancer? How will their outcomes be measured? What must be understood is that quality is a statistical problem that involves improving the "mean", i.e., the minimum standard of care for all patients. There will always be outliers who challenge all medical diagnostic and therapeutic regimens, as well as those patients who benefit from no interventions. One thing is certain the movement from volume-to-value involves an increased need for extensive monitoring and data analytics to obtain the necessary information to determine improvements and to detect areas to improve upon to ultimately provide better health care.

Find out more

Sizzurp - The Cough Drink of Choice

Promethazine with codeine has gained a lot of media attention, owing not to its effectiveness as a cough medication, but rather to its abuse as a recreational drug. The controlled prescription cough syrup is being mixed with soda and often a "Jolly Rancher" candy to create the glamorized concoction known on the streets as "Sizzurp," "Purple Drank," or "Lean." Promethazine, an antihistamine, causes sedation and motor skill impairment, while codeine, an opioid, produces the desired feeling of euphoria. The very publicized abuse has led Actavis, a major manufacturer of promethazine with codeine, to remove their product from the market.

Stephenson A. Sizzurp: What is it and why are so many celebrities getting hooked on it? news.com.au. 27 June 2014. Accessed from <http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/sizzurp-what-is-it-and-why-are-so-many-celebrities-getting-hooked-on-it/story-fnk822dn-1226968969009>.

Comment:

"Sizzurp" users are not only hurting themselves but also the patients who require promethazine with codeine for its actual indication, to relieve upper respiratory symptoms. Physicians may now be reluctant to prescribe the widely misused cough syrup and as manufacturers remove formulations from the market, prices may increase.

A More important question may be, is this drug combination even effective? A few small observational studies suggest that codeine, as a centrally acting antitussive agent, may be no more effective than dextromethorphan, which is available over-the-counter.

With this in mind, physicians should consider other cough treatments, and if need be, prescribe the non-opioid formulation, promethazine and dextromethorphan. Other responsible actions to consider are for health insurers to remove promethazine with codeine from preferred drug lists and to allow the agent only when medically necessary via prior authorizations. However, prior authorizations may not be a practical option due to the large volume of prescriptions being written. This is where pharmacists can step in and play a vital role in limiting the abuse by bringing awareness to physicians and recommending other therapies.

Drug Transparency Laws and Possible Outcomes

The high costs of prescription medications has generated a demand for laws to enforce drug cost transparency. Many criticize Pharmaceutical Companies by attributing the high costs to greed. Robert Ingram, former CEO and chairman of GlaxoWellcome and current lead director at Valeant Pharmaceuticals, believes that these people are endangering modern medicine. He points out that research, development, and the trial and error process of creating novel medications is very expensive, and expresses concerns that capping drug prices may hinder advancements within the Pharmaceutical Industry. "Critics seem to think they can have it both ways: A flowing pipeline of new wonder drugs spurred by a free market and government price controls on pharmaceutical success stories. In reality, patients will suffer as companies abandon research on new treatments because of the uncertain prospect of ever breaking even," Ingram explains.

Ingram RA. A not-so-transparent attempt to cap drug prices. The Wall Street Journal. 19 July 2015. Accessed from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/a-not-so-transparent-attempt-to-cap-drug-prices-1437342475>.

Comment:

While some envision drug transparency laws to create a more honest and accessible health care system, others anticipate adverse repercussions. Perhaps transparency will change nothing except for the public perception of the high cost of new drugs. If the expenses of research and development are brought into light, including any losses due to trial and error, patients may be more accepting of the established prices. Transparency laws might consider allowing Pharmaceutical Companies to justify profits with new investment proposals to avoid any interruptions in the drug development process.

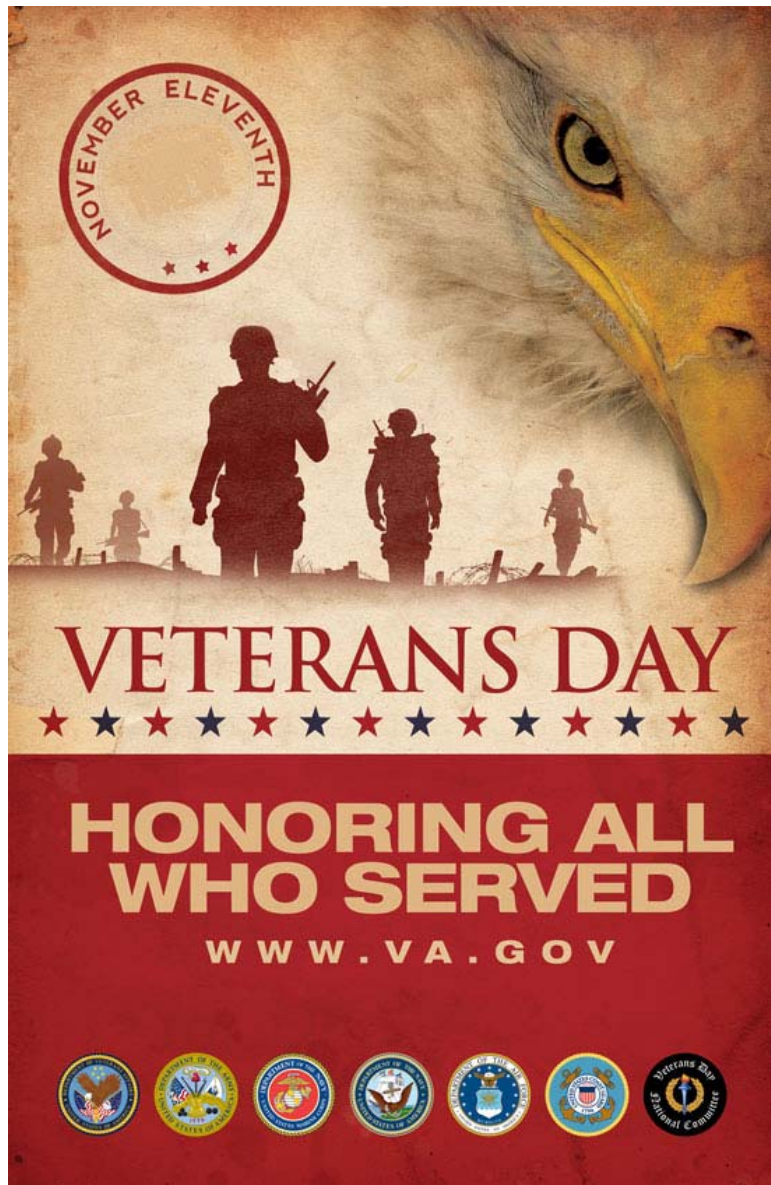
To Our Veterans and Troops

Veterans and Troops put their lives on the line to protect our way of life, our families, and our country. Their contributions have made and continue to make an impact on the lives of us all.

To all the sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, friends, neighbors and all who have served our nation; they will always hold a special place in our hearts and minds.

In loving memory of our Pro Pharma relatives who have served in World War II, the Korean War, and Desert Storm.

We Thank You!



Pro Pharma Pharmaceutical Consultants, Inc. has assisted payer and providers for over 29 years to maintain quality while controlling costs.

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