My patience may finally have run out for Big Pharmacy with recent reports showing its continued strangle hold on America’s health care costs and the dire effects on the cost Medicare for our Medicare population. These reports show the costs are still soaring for the fifth straight year of double-digit increases.

In a recent article by Candy Sagon for AARP, titled “Rx Drug Costs for Older Adults Still Soaring – AARP,” Sagon reported that nearly 300 brand name drugs increased almost 130 times faster than general inflation from 2014 to 2015. Even with the growing outrage from some politicians and patients over soaring drug prices, it has done little if anything to slow their ascent with the retail price tag. Most of the brand-name drugs used by older Americans jumped an average of 15.5 % in 2015.

Let me give you examples of what Sagon found in her investigation. Sagon found examples of drug price increases over the past ten years to include Ativan 1 mg tablets, the anti-anxiety drug, with price hikes of up to 2,873 % between 2006 and 2015, and the antidepressant Wellbutrin XL 300 mg tablets, which increased by 1,185 %. The retail price of Humulin U-500, a short-acting insulin product used to treat diabetes, rose by 538 % over the past ten years, most of that in the past five years.

Prescription drug price increases affect retirement programs, those without a prescription drug plan and taxpayer-funded health care programs like Medicare and Medicaid. In fact, Sagon’s findings echo an earlier report earlier this year by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that looked at the 20 highest price increases from 2014 to 2015. Spending by CMS on these drugs jumped from $146 million to $486 million, the data showed. That’s just five of the over 3,300 medications on the Medicare formulary.

“We will never get health care costs under control as long as drug manufacturers are free to set incredibly high prices and then increase them every time the mood strikes,” said report co-author Leigh Purvis, director of health services research for AARP’s Public Policy Institute.

Americans pay the highest price for prescription drugs in the world. And as a result, nearly 1 in 5 U.S. residents - 35 million people - do not fill a prescription each year because they cannot afford it.

In 2015, the five largest drug corporations raked in more than $50 BILLION in profits. They manipulate the drug market to artificially inflate the cost of generic drugs. They reformulate and re-brand existing drugs to gouge consumers with high prices. And that money comes right out of our Social Security benefits.

At a time when the 37% of the average Social Security check goes toward out-of-pocket health care costs, it is critical that Congress act to protect the American people from these out-of-control pharmaceutical corporations.

Last month, several members of Congress introduced the “Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act” to lower drug prices and rein in abuses by the pharmaceutical corporations. The bill would:
• Allow Medicare to negotiate fair prices and accelerate the closing of the Part D donut hole.
• Allow residents and pharmacies to import safe, affordable drugs from Canada, which thousands of seniors already do, and eventually from other select countries.
• Require drug companies to disclose financial information including profits and pricing information and increase competition of generic drugs and incentivize innovation among Big Pharmacy.

In the wealthiest nation on earth, at the richest period in our country’s history, it is shocking that millions of residents are forced to go without critical, lifesaving medication because of the “profit at any cost” mentality of prescription drug corporations.
New Advances Changing Patient Heart Care

The heart pumps approximately 2,000 gallons of blood each day. The human body is dependent on the heart to pump a sufficient supply to receive nutrients and oxygen. But for 13 million Americans, blood is not able to flow due to blocked vessels. Now a revolutionary new procedure is changing the way cardiologists treat patients with coronary heart disease.

Mac Ansari, M.D., co-director of structural and interventional cardiology at Texas Tech Physicians Center for Cardiovascular Health, said through this new technology, physicians could open a person’s vessels and save their life with a new dissolvable stent.

“The dissolvable stent will keep your vessel open and leaves it like the original vessel,” Ansari said.

Stents are devices that open an artery and restores blood flow through a narrowed or blocked artery. Traditionally, stents have been made of metal that remain forever in the artery. The new stents will gradually fade away.

Ansari explains in the past there were not many options for patients. Before stents cardiologists used balloon therapy to balloon the vessel. But eventually, the vessel would close again.

“Then came the stents that were made of metal, but the problem was the body would consider them a foreign body, and the vessels would close up again,” Ansari said. “The solution at the time was a drug-eluting stent or DES. The drug would calm down the wall along with the help of medication. But again the metal stent would remain in the body for life.”

There are two types of patients that would need stents. The first is a person who suffers from a myocardia infarction or a heart attack. The stent is used to open up the closed vessel quickly to save the patient.

The other is to help patients with coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD changes the structure and function of the blood vessels. Those changes lead to a narrowing of the lumen or tunnels leading to a decreased blood flow to the heart causing symptoms.

“When medications or medical management is not helping these patients, stenting will help control the symptoms,” Ansari said.

Ansari said, “symptoms of CAD could include shortness of breath or pressure or tightness in your chest.”

“What also is innovative about the new stents is how they are placed on the patient,” Ansari said. “With these new dissolvable stents, we go through the arm or femoral artery in the patient’s leg. The cardiologists will go in with a catheter and push in dye to see where the disease is. After, a wire is passed through to place the stent. Because of this, the patient has a quicker and safer recovery rate. When I did my first stenting with two stents at UMC, I was able to say to the patient, ‘today you have two stents but in two years you will not.’ The patient could not believe it.”

Dr. Mac Ansari is Seniors are Special medical guest speaker Wednesday, May 10.

Beware of Medical Scams, by National Institute of Health

Today; there are more ways than ever to sell untested products—online, TV, radio, magazines, and newspapers are just a few examples. Actors portray doctors and patients on infomercials. You might even get an email urging you to try a product. It can be hard to tell what’s an ad and what’s a scam.

Be skeptical. Something might be a scam if it:
• Promises a quick or painless cure
• Claims the product is made from a special, secret, or ancient formula
• Offers products and services only by mail or from one company
• Uses statements or unproven case histories from so-called satisfied patients
• Claims to be a cure for a wide range of ailments
• Claims to cure a disease (such as arthritis or Alzheimer’s disease) that hasn’t been cured by medical science
• Promises a no-risk, money back guarantee
• Offers an additional free gift or a larger amount of the product as a special promotion
• Requires advance payment and claims there is a limited supply of the product

Only you can protect yourself from health scams. Health scams usually target diseases that currently have no cure, like arthritis, cancer, or memory loss. They may even promise “anti-aging” effects. Be skeptical, question what you see or hear in online ads, and always ask your doctor before you start using a new product.
Three Common Foods You May Not Know Can Cause Bloating

by Dr. Sameer Islam

Bloating is the bane of many person’s existences and is a hard condition to treat. Though there is a multitude of reasons why people feel bloated, food commonly is a culprit. Here are three common foods you may not know cause bloating and some tips to handle it.

Apples

They say an apple a day keeps a doctor away. For most people, that is true, but for others, this can be the reason why you feel bloated.

There are sugars in apples which can be hard for the digestive system. Apples derive their yummy sweetness from two sugars, sorbitol, and fructose. Not everyone’s body, especially those with irritable bowel syndrome, can tolerate them, resulting in gas and diarrhea. The best way to deal with this problem is to eat them in moderation and in-between meals as a snack.

Cruciferous Vegetables

I bet you are asking, “what the heck are these.” Cruciferous vegetables are one of the most dominant food crops worldwide. They are high in vitamin C and soluble fiber and contain multiple nutrients and phytochemicals. These are foods like broccoli, kale, cabbage with a lot of nutritional value, but can lead to bloating because they contain raffinose. Raffinose is an indigestible sugar that produces a lot of gas, bloating, and pain.

However, if these vegetables are eaten regularly and in small amounts, the digestive system can be strengthened, and less gas will be produced. Alternatively, you can also cook these vegetables instead of eating them raw. This softens the fiber and also slightly shrinks the veggies, taking up less space in your stomach, making you feel less uncomfortable.

Beans

You may have heard something when you were a kid about beans making you have gas. Well, that is true. Beans have a lot of fiber and sugar, helping out with constipation. But these same ingredients can make bloating and distension worse.

Try keeping your bean intake in moderation to help out with bloating. The trick, if you love beans, is to eat them in small quantities and let your body gradually adjust. An alternative is to combine them in meals with whole grains like rice that are easy for your body to break down. Either way, you will likely be able to eat legumes with more comfort.

So if you like the foods above but have problems with gas, eating them in moderation for a certain period of time can often help your body get used to it and reduce problems with bloating and discomfort.

Sameer Islam, MD is a board-certified Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist practicing at Southwest Gastroenterology in Lubbock, Texas. For an appointment feel free to contact his office at (806)-761-0747. You can get more information from his webpage (www.sameerislam.com).

UMC Ranked Among Top Employers in Texas

UMC Health System was ranked among the best places to work in Texas by the Best Companies Group and the Texas Association of Business, which released their annual rankings.

UMC ranked third in the large company category for organizations with more than 500 employees. UMC has ranked among the top three companies for nine of the past ten years, including three years as No. 1. A complete list of winners will appear in the May issue of Texas Monthly.

“Service is our passion, and when you walk through the halls of our hospital, you will see a smile on every face,” said Adrienne Cozart, UMC senior vice president for human resources. “The joy our employees have for working here translates into excellent service for our patients as well, which is why UMC is also ranked among the top 10 percent in the nation for patient experience by HealthGrades.”

The companies were ranked by the Texas Association of Business, the Texas State Council of the Society for Human Resource Management and Best Companies Group. There were 100 companies ranked overall by varying size.

Employee satisfaction leads to lower employee turnover, which is closely linked with patient satisfaction, safety and quality. An independent survey by Press Ganey found UMC employee satisfaction ranked at the 96th percentile in 2017, compared to hospitals nationwide. It was the ninth-straight year UMC has topped the 90th percentile.

UMC Health System is ranked among the top 10 percent of hospitals in the nation for patient satisfaction by HealthGrades and has consistently ranked among the best places to work in Texas by the Best Companies Group. More than 400,000 patients a year choose UMC.
Medicare ID cards will remove Social Security numbers in 2018. Medicare is preparing to stop using Social Security numbers for identification next year and will send new cards to patients with Medicare ID numbers. The move is required by a law enacted two years ago to discourage identity theft.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently updated its webpage to help health care providers prepare for the change. The agency plans to begin mailing the new cards with Medicare beneficiary identifiers (MBIs) in April 2018. During a transition period through 2019, providers can use the MBIs or health insurance claim numbers (which are based on Social Security numbers) on transactions such as billing and claims.

The 2015 law, the Medicare Access, and CHIP Reauthorization Act requires CMS to remove Social Security numbers from Medicare cards by April 2019.

“We’re now figuring out the best way to mail the cards,” the agency advised providers. “We’ll keep you posted about critical information so you can be ready to ask your Medicare patients at the time of service if they have a new card with an MBI.”

CMS plans a “wide-scale outreach” to let beneficiaries know that they need to bring their new Medicare cards when they get care and how to get MBIs if they lose their cards.

Here is important advice for all Medicare recipients from AARP’s Fraud Watch Network ambassador, Frank Abagnale, he advises consumers not to share Social Security numbers unnecessarily. “And don’t carry your Medicare card unless you are on your way to a health care appointment,” he wrote last year. “Instead, make a copy and black out all but the last four digits.”

Texas Tech Otolaryngology Center Offers SAS Discount

Texas Tech Department of Otolaryngology Center is the new hearing center for our members operated by the Texas Tech School of Medicine Department of Otolaryngology. You will still see many of the same smiling faces providing great quality care, but we have moved a few hundred yards to the northeast. Texas Tech Physicians of Lubbock Audiology located on the 4th floor of the Texas Tech Medical Pavilion in the Otolaryngology Clinic. Hearing and balance testing, hearing aids, and cochlear implants are just some of the services offered by our friendly and highly trained providers.

If we can assist you or a family member with any of your hearing or balance needs, give us a call at (806) 743-2373 to make an appointment or to get more information. Be sure and let us know that you are a member of Seniors Are Special, as we offer you a 10% discount on all hearing aids! We look forward to serving you and your family at Texas Tech Physicians of Lubbock Audiology.

Dr. Ansari, SAS’s April Guest Speaker

Dr. Mac Ansari is the co-director of structural and interventional cardiology at Texas Tech Physicians Center for Cardiovascular health.

Dr. Ansari is Senior’s medical program on May 10th. Dr. Ansair will speak about the new advances and how they have changed patient heart care at Texas Tech Physicians Center for Cardiovascular Health.

His presentation will begin at 4:00 PM Wednesday, May 10th in the McInturff Conference Center. He will be preceded by Ronica Farrar who will speak at 3:00 PM about Poison Control and Prescription Drug problems.

This is a free program open to the public, for additional information contact SAS at 775-8760.

Dr. Ansari, SAS’s April Guest Speaker

Ronica Farrar, SAS’s April Guest Speaker

Ronica Farrar is the lead educator for the Texas Panhandle Poison Center. The Center is located at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center here in Lubbock. Ronica started her career at the poison center in 2001 and still loves her job providing important safety information to the public. Her responsibility is to raise awareness of poison center services and educate about poison safety in our 71 county region. Prior to joining the poison center staff, she worked as a flight paramedic with LIFESTAR in Amarillo.

Farrar’s program will present her safety program at 3:00 PM and followed by Dr. Ansari’s talk on Stints at 4:00 PM in UMC’s McInturff Conference Center. This is a free program open to the public, for additional information contact SAS at 775-8760.
Open House Week: To celebrate our anniversary the UMC Activities Center is having an Open House Week, May 1st-5th. A whole week for you to come check out an exercise class or two, enjoy talks on Physical Activity & Health, Dizziness & Vertigo, Functional Communication Activities for Brain Injury & Dementia and Safety in the Home. Guest fees are WAIVED all week! Now, there is no excuse not to come see what the UMC Activities Center is all about.

The schedule of events is as follows:
- May 1st drop in/guest fee WAIVED, come visit and attend classes at the
UMC Activities Center
- May 2nd at 12:30 PM Physical Activity & Health, Laura Hinojosa, PT & Janda Bishop, OTR, MOT from South Plains Rehab Center
- May 3rd at 3:00 PM Dizziness & Vertigo, Carrie Bradshaw, PT, DPT and
Functional Communication Activities for Brain Injury & Dementia, Jennifer Selin, M.S., CFSLP from South Plains Rehab Center
- May 4th at 12:30 PM Safety in the Home, Linda Velardez, RN, BSN with UMC Home Health

Besides free exercise classes and informative talks the week of May 1st-5th. There is a chance for both current members and non-members to win a FREE 3 Month Membership. Members: come to the talks on May 2nd, 3rd, & 4th to be entered and bring friends to try out the facility. Non-members: come out and try classes and attend the talks to get entered into the drawing for a FREE 3 Month Membership.

UMCAC’s Class of the Month: The class under the spotlight this month is Line Dance Vocabulary with Gail. Line Dance Vocabulary is where you will learn the language of basic line dance steps. The steps will be taught and explained through a “feet on” experience with a detailed walk-through. Each basic step will be incorporated into a dance exercise that is vocally cued with music. Line Dance Vocabulary prepares you for more advanced line dance classes. Dance steps that maybe learned include waltz, cha cha, rumba, tango, mambo, and two-step. Intensity Level: Low to Moderate. Line Dance Vocabulary with Gail meets on Tuesday, at 4:00PM and Wednesday, at 1:10PM. Line Dance Vocabulary is taught on a progressing scale from easiest steps to more difficult steps and then starting back over. Line Dance Vocabulary will be starting from the beginning with most basic steps on May 9th. So come out during Open House week and get your feet wet with some absolute beginning dances; this is the perfect opportunity to try out Line Dance if you’ve been curious. Then start your “feet on” experience on May 9th. Can’t start May 9th that’s ok you can start your line dance experience at any time but May 9th will start with the most basic steps.

You are more than welcome to start Line Dance Vocabulary at any time, but please realize you may starting somewhere along the progression and not with the most basic steps.

Line Dance Vocabulary with Gail might be a class for you if you are looking to get active without the feel of going to an “exercise class.” It is also a class for you if you like to dance but don’t want to find a partner. Line Dance Vocabulary is an great way to get active, get moving and met some great people will having fun. Come out give Line Dance Vocabulary with Gail a try on Tuesday, at 4:00PM and Wednesday, at 1:10PM.

From the Membership: This month we decided to talk to Doris, Honey, Jane, and Rita about Line Dance Vocabulary. These ladies started almost two years ago and are still enjoying line dance classes now. The following information is some of what they shared with us about Line Dance Vocabulary: It is fun to learn all the steps and rhythms then dance them to music, but the best part is the camaraderie amongst the ladies. We have made many new friends that are nice, caring people with a common interest, if feels like an extended family. The benefits of this class include staying active (both mentally & physically) and helping to improve your coordination; all while having fun. Line Dance Vocabulary is a great place to make friends, get exercise, learn new ways to take care of “our senior years” and the sense of accomplishment when you can say “I can line dance.”

Closed for a Long Weekend: The UMC Activities Center will be closed on Monday, May 29th in observance of Memorial Day. Regular hours will resume on Tuesday, May 30th. Enjoy the extra time off this Memorial Day weekend!
Seniors Are Special’s Monthly Seminar

Wednesday, May 10, 2017
3:00 PM – 5:00 PM
McInturff Conference Center at UMC

Lifestyle Topic: 3:00 PM
Ronica Farrar, Educator
Texas Panhandle Poison Center
“Facts about Medication Poisonings In Senior Adults”

Medical Topic: 4:00 PM
Dr. Mac Ansari,
Co-Director of Structural
and Interventional Cardiology
Texas Tech Physicians Center for Cardiovascular Health
“Dissolvable Stints the Latest
in Cardiovascular Surgery”

Join us for Seniors are Special’s monthly educational seminars. These seminars meet on the second Wednesday of each month beginning at 3:00 PM in UMC’s McInturff Conference Center. The meetings are free, open to the public, and no reservations are necessary. Please bring a friend. For further information on these meetings, call SAS at 806-775-8760.

Shuttle transportation service is available from Tech’s southwest parking lot for SAS’s monthly meeting

UMC’s Courtesy Shuttle vans provide free shuttle service between 2:30 PM and 3:30 PM and 4:15 PM to 5:15 PM for our seminar guests. The shuttle picks up at the Texas Tech parking lot located SOUTH WEST of the Texas Tech Parkway, off 10th Street. Turn west at the 10th Street & Texas Tech Parkway light. The parking lot is located one block down on your left hand side of the street. Follow the SAS parking signs. You are, however, free to park in any of UMC’s parking lots.

Happy Mother’s Day
14TH MAY