

**Question:** How much money is wasted each year by Medicare on discarded drugs?  
A) \$100 million B) \$200 million C) \$300 million D) \$500 million E) \$700 million

### Screening for Diabetes in the ER

Screening for diabetes can be an interesting activity. One time I was doing this in Mexico using glucose measurements on a drop of blood obtained by finger prick. Most readings were normal, and a few were in the low 100's. I was astonished when a healthy-looking woman had a reading of 500. A retest again showed 500. She had not had a meal in several hours. In another case, a plump girl about 10 years-old was tested and found to have a glucose of 300. We advised her parents to seek medical care.

A group of investigators in Chicago decided to evaluate whether screening for diabetes in patients that show up at an urban ER would identify patients with unrecognized diabetes.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 8 ½ million Americans have diabetes and do not know it, and early diagnosis is essential for optimal treatment. They identified 2074 patients with a best-practice-alert (BPA) in their medical record that had an A1c measurement on a blood sample. The BPA screened for patients over 45 years old, for those with a BMI>25, and no recent A1c measurement.

They found that 1085 patients had an abnormal A1c, of which 70% were found to have pre-diabetes (A1c = 5.7-6.4 %) and 30% had diabetes (A1c>6.4%). Severe diabetes (A1c > 10%) was found in 6 % of patients. Among those with abnormal results, one-fourth of those that could be contacted by phone reported that they had been diagnosed with pre-diabetes or diabetes, and less than half of these patients were receiving any treatment.



### Loneliness and Mortality in the Elderly

Most of us have elderly folks in our lives. Living a long life has been associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and dementia. A team of investigators decided to determine if loneliness was associated with post-surgical outcomes in Medicare patients.<sup>2</sup> The loneliness score involved three questions whose answers were formed into a 3-point scale. The main outcome assessed was the 30-day mortality after surgery of various kinds. The 4452 patients in the study had a mean age of 75 years.

The investigators found that for most types of surgery there was no association between loneliness and 30-day mortality; however, for those undergoing non-elective surgery, there was a clear association between increased loneliness and increased risk of mortality. The authors called for better post-operative support after patient discharge. There is a message for my readers. Find time to visit those who have recently undergone serious surgery, especially if it was not elective. You might just be filling the void of loneliness and prolonging someone's life.

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36701158/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36383393/>

## Medicare Spending on Discarded Drugs

A team of investigators decided to estimate the commercial value of drugs that were discarded in Medicare plan B (not advantage plans) from 2017 to 2020.<sup>3</sup> The greatest monetary value of the drugs discarded were chemotherapy drugs and drugs used in infusions. They estimated that \$3 billion worth of drugs were discarded over the four years of the study. Not only could money be saved by capturing drugs that would otherwise be discarded, but this could also allow some patients who need a chemotherapy drug to receive it even if it is in short supply.

A couple of experts placed this finding in perspective.<sup>4</sup> They point out that roughly \$700 million is paid each year from Medicare funds (your money) for discarded drugs. Several ways to stop this hemorrhage would be to have more-appropriately sized vials or share the contents among two patients. Medicare could also just pay for the drugs used in a specific patient and not for any that is discarded.

## Physical Activity Improves Mental Health

Physical activity has long been associated with many facets of better health in adults. A group of three PhD experts noted in an editorial that a recent meta-analysis has shown that physical activity may reduce symptoms of depression in youth.<sup>5</sup> The analysis included many modes of exercise as reported from a wide variety of countries. This finding seems important because of the rise of depression among American youth. The authors indicate that the studies of exercise's impact on mental health of youth is immature. There are many unanswered questions. What are the best exercises and how often should they be performed, and for how long? How can clinicians prescribe physical activity and how do parents implement recommendations?

My observations with getting youth to exercise include the following: choose a fun and

convenient form of exercise, get several friends to participate together in this exercise, and hold parents accountable for compliance.

## High Cost of Employer-Sponsored Insurance (ESI) Drugs

A couple of experts asked an interesting question: How much mark-up is there on the cost of physician-administered drugs when compared to the cost paid by Medicare?<sup>6</sup> Medicare payments for such drugs are based on the average sales price, whereas the price of ESI drugs is negotiated between health systems and the insurers. The investigator looked at drugs with the highest spending and highest use. I will only include data from 2020.

Among the top five spend drugs, the markups of ESI prices compared to Medicare prices ranged from 20% to 54%. Among the most used drugs, the two largest price differences were 20 and 30 times as much for ESI drugs as for Medicare drugs. The authors conclude that the high cost of physician-administered drugs, which one might assume are innovative, tends to limit the affordability of these drugs, and thereby limits access by patients. So, if you wonder why your ESI premiums are costly, now you know one answer to the question.

## Does a Paid-Claim for Malpractice Predict More Claims Later?

The investigative team looked at the paid-malpractice claims of more than 880,000 licensed physicians in the US.<sup>7</sup> Their analysis spanned 2018 to early 2023. Their approach was to compare the probability of a claim during a future period based on whether a physician had had one or more paid claims in the prior period. Of the physicians with zero paid claims in the prior period, 3% had one or more claims in the future period. Of the physicians with one paid claim in the prior period, 12% had a

<sup>3</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36534384/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36534375/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36595261/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-health-forum/fullarticle/2801228>

<sup>7</sup> <https://media.jamanetwork.com/news-item/association-of-past-and-future-paid-medical-malpractice-claims/>

claim in the future period. The likelihood of a future paid claim increased as the number of prior claims went from 1 to 3 claims. The authors suggest that ‘noncoercive intervention, including education’ may reduce future claims.

What I know is that paid malpractice claims represent a small fraction of the harm that stems from malpractice. Ideally, you should be able to find information about a physician’s malpractice claims in your state medical board database. If you think you have been the victim of medical malpractice, you may find that accountability for the harm caused is going to be elusive.

### **Trends in Use of Psychotropic Drugs in Nursing Homes**

Last November CMS released a report on the use of two types of psychotropic drugs in nursing home residents – antipsychotics and with less emphasis - anticonvulsants.<sup>8</sup> Data from 2011-2019 was surveyed. The investigators concluded that about 80% of nursing home residents receive psychotropic drugs and that rate was constant over the period of the study.

When focus was placed on schizophrenia, the investigators concluded as follows: ‘we found that from 2015 through 2019 both the reporting of residents with schizophrenia in the MDS [Minimum Data Set] and the number of residents who lacked a corresponding schizophrenia diagnosis in Medicare claims and encounter data increased by 194 percent. In 2019, the unsupported reporting of schizophrenia was concentrated in 99 nursing homes in which 20 percent or more of the residents had a report of schizophrenia in the MDS that was not found in the Medicare claims history.’

The authors recommended better transparency for CMS into what is going on with use of antipsychotic drugs in nursing homes. If you are looking after a nursing home resident, question the rationale for use of any psychotropic drug.

### **Attacks on Health Care Facilities in Ukraine**

As if you have not heard enough bad news about Putin’s attack on Ukraine, I have some more. Three experts, one from Ukraine, surveyed and documented the damage done by Putin’s war to the healthcare infrastructure in Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> They documented that 186 healthcare facilities have been attacked and 32 destroyed. There have been 65 attacks on ambulances. Sixty-two healthcare workers have been killed and 52 injured. Roughly 10% of Ukraine’s hospitals have been damaged. Eighty percent of the healthcare infrastructure in Mariupol has been destroyed.

The need for care of civilians physically wounded has obviously increased, but just as important is the psychological trauma induced by the ceaseless attacks. The authors believe that ‘these attacks likely constitute war crimes and comprise a course of conduct that could also constitute crimes against humanity.’ Here is one worker’s account that the authors quoted from a source:

*On April 2, they set up a tank somewhere behind the forest and shot the hospital, just like that, from the tank—six shells—five of them hit our buildings....They interrupted our heat supply and water system, and we realized on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April that the hospital could not work here. On [that day], we discharged as many patients as possible and everyone else who was [sheltering] in the basement.*

The authors call for better documentation of the attacks on healthcare so that those responsible can be brought to justice, and international laws on humanitarian law can be enforced. They also note that around the world, attacks on healthcare are common during war time. The international community must not permit attacks on healthcare infrastructure and personnel to become the new normal.

My ask to readers is that you send money to a relief agency that is active in helping the many civilian victims in Ukraine.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/OEI-07-20-00500.asp>

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36809545/>

## Links

IG on overuse of psychotropic drugs in nursing home residents: <https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/OEI-07-20-00500.asp>

AMA Journal of Ethics issue on child abuse (whole issue is available): [https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/sites/journalofethics.ama-assn.org/files/2023-01/joe-2302\\_0.pdf](https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/sites/journalofethics.ama-assn.org/files/2023-01/joe-2302_0.pdf)

Patient advocate gets law in California requiring doctors to inform patients if they get payments from drug or device companies (SEE OPEN PAYMENTS WEBSITE): <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/investigations/new-california-law-doctors-payments-tracking-payments-drug-companies/3086869/>

Fake nursing licenses: <https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/02/2800-fake-nurses-lurk-in-the-us-states-are-working-to-track-them-down/>

'Dead' woman in Iowa found to be alive: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/02/02/iowa-woman-declared-dead-alive-funeral-home/11172947002/>

Medicine is slow to learn from experience: <https://www.peoplespharmacy.com/articles/scurvy-mystery-reveals-arrogance-of-medicine>

Value based care is needed (Commonwealth Fund): <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/explainer/2023/feb/value-based-care-what-it-is-why-its-needed>

Healthcare insights in detail and by specific subjects: <https://healthontheweb.com/key-websites/>

Preying on patients: <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/2023/02/06/preying-on-patients-hundreds-of-doctors-have-abused-harassed-ohioans/11177919002/>

Why is there no doctor in the ER? [https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/16/health/er-doctors-khn-partner \\$\\$\\$](https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/16/health/er-doctors-khn-partner $$$)

More on Profits-over-Patients: <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-care/roaches-operating-room-hca-hospital-florida-rcna69563>

The big business of clogged arteries: <https://www.propublica.org/article/medtronic-medical-device-kickbacks-lawsuit-kansas>

Carcinogen contaminants in many common medications: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2023/02/16/fd>

[a-medication-drug-nitrosamines-evaluation/11219183002/?s=03](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2023/02/13/fda-approval-drugs-missed-goals/11247727002/)

One tenth of FDA-approved drugs do not achieve therapeutic goals: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2023/02/13/fda-approval-drugs-missed-goals/11247727002/>

Utah adds insulting ruling to alleged sexual harm of 94 women against doctor: <https://www.propublica.org/article/94-utah-women-sue-obgyn-for-sexual-assault-judge-tosses-case>

Physician's quest for justice after wife is victim of medical malpractice: <https://www.kevinmd.com/2023/02/a-tale-of-medical-malpractice-the-legal-system-and-a-fight-for-justice.html>

How to reduce the cost of long-term care in the US (Commonwealth Fund): <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2023/feb/us-global-financing-long-term-care-patchwork>

How soon will you need a COVID booster? (Kevin Kavanagh, MD): <https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/how-soon-is-another-booster-needed-durability-vaccine-induced-immunity>

Idaho surgeon arrested for sexual battery: [Surgeon's arrest for sexual battery a 'catalyst' for Idaho health care workers to talk about abuse - Idaho Capital Sun](https://www.idahocapital.com/news/2023/02/16/surgeon-arrested-for-sexual-battery-a-catalyst-for-idaho-health-care-workers-to-talk-about-abuse-idaho-capital-sun)

Malpractice information not available from the National Practitioner Data Bank: [Most extensive database for doctor misconduct is unviewable to public | KPIC](https://www.kpic.com/news/2023/02/16/malpractice-information-not-available-from-the-national-practitioner-data-bank-kpic)

Concurrent surgeries cost this heart surgeon and Pittsburg hospital \$8.5 million: <https://www.healthcarediver.com/news/upmc-surgeon-pay-85m-settle-whistleblower-lawsuit-over-concurrent-surgeries/643715/>



NATIONAL  
QUALITY FORUM  
MEMBER

Find past newsletters:  
<http://patientsafetyamerica.com/e-newsletter/>

**Answer to question: E, reference 3.**

