

[IMAGE]

## Medication Overload

By Editorial Staff

How much do Americans spend on (legal) drugs? Would you believe \$300 billion – yes, we said *billion* – a year and climbing? More disturbing, of this annual revenue, a significantly larger percentage is spent on advertising than on research and development, according to several reports. Yes, the pharmaceutical industry spends billions to convince the public it needs drugs (and medical doctors that they need to prescribe drugs), makes billions more doing it, and spends a smaller portion of its earnings researching and developing safer, more effective products. Now there's a formula for a healthy, safe America.

A pair of studies published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* provides more disheartening news, highlighting the medicine-money monopoly and its impact on health care. One study found that while doctors and hospitals spend staggering amounts of money to treat Medicare patients, how much or how little they spend has no correlation with patients' health outcomes. In other words, prescribing more (or more expensive) medication doesn't equate to better health outcomes. The study also found that in areas with higher per-capita medical spending, patients were more likely to receive "riskier" (and presumably higher-priced) drugs.

The second study in *NEJM* found that when Medicare stopped reimbursing doctors as much for certain drugs, *doctors prescribed the drugs less*. With higher reimbursement rates, doctors were more likely to prescribe – inappropriately or unnecessarily, according to the study.

medication - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark So, let's summarize: Big Pharma makes billions on drug sales every year and its revenues are only expected to rise in the coming years. The pharmaceutical industry spends more money convincing people to take medication than it does researching their effectiveness and safety. Doctors who get paid more to prescribe drugs tend to do just that: prescribe more, but doctors and hospitals who prescribe the most don't seem to be helping patients any more than if they prescribed less drugs (or less expensive drugs). Health care costs and medication side effects skyrocket as we become a nation of pill-poppers. Not exactly what Thomas Edison envisioned when he predicted, "The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his or her patients in the care of the human frame, in a proper diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease."

The next time your doctor starts writing you a drug prescription, ask them the following questions first: Are there are options we could try first that don't involve medication? What are the side effects of this medication? How long do I need to take it? If it doesn't work, what will we do next (besides going on another prescription for a different drug)? All good questions that deserve good answers *before* you make that trip to your local pharmacy.

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