

## Hospital Costs Almost Double in a Decade

According to Bloomberg News, hospital costs have increased 90 percent over the last decade. Bloomberg's report is based on research conducted by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) that highlights an increase in annual hospital costs from \$462 billion in 1997 to \$873 billion in 2005. The findings show hospital costs approaching \$1 trillion next year, and the report attributes the increase to an aging population seeking care for stroke and heart disease.

The research revealed Medicare as the primary payer of hospital services, accounting for \$411 billion of costs with private insurers paying \$272 billion and Medicaid providing \$124 billion over the study period.

The findings indicate that hospital costs associated with stroke increased 51 percent, with coronary heart disease-related costs rising 44 percent. Heart attacks accounted for the largest expense among the uninsured. According to the Wall Street Journal, the five costliest categories for the study period were coronary-artery disease, pregnancy and delivery, newborn-infant care, heart attack, and congestive heart failure.

## Research Suggests Overuse of CT Scans May Lead to Significant Public Health Problem

Researchers at the Center for Radiological Research at Columbia University are suggesting the growing overuse of Computed Tomography (CT) scans may lead to serious health consequences for many. While the value of CT scans to diagnose injury, cancer, and other health problems is undisputed, researchers argue that the potential carcinogenic effects from using CT scans may be underestimated or overlooked. The finding is of particular concern because it is estimated that as many as one-third of all CT scans performed in the United States may not be medically necessary.

CT scans are an increasingly used X-ray-based tool for providing a three-dimensional view of a particular organ or tissue. In many instances the CT scans are used rather than the conventional X-ray films. It is estimated that more than 62 million CT scans are performed each year in the United States, compared to three million in 1980. Because CT scans result in a significantly larger radiation exposure than a conventional X-ray, individuals receiving them could be at greater risk for developing health problems. Although the individual risk is small, researchers suggest that in the future 1.5-2 percent of all cancers in the United States may be due to the radiation from CT scans being done now. Complicating the issue are surveys suggesting that a majority of radiologists and emergency-room physicians may not appreciate that CT scans are likely to increase the lifetime risk of cancer.

The report states that reducing the number of CT scans performed may be necessary to reduce the public health risks. It also suggests that decreasing the amount of radiation used as well as replacing CT scans with non-radiation-related tests such as ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) could keep up to 20 million adults and one million children from being irradiated unnecessarily.

## Health Quiz

1. Researchers at Columbia University believe up to one-third of all CT scans are medically unnecessary.  
  
(a) True  
(b) False
2. The CDC recommends what level of physical activity per day for adults?  
  
(a) 15 minutes  
(b) 30 minutes  
(c) 45 minutes  
(d) 60 minutes
3. Scientists have proved that mature human cells may be returned to an embryonic like state without the use of an embryo.  
  
(a) True  
(b) False
4. Based on a report by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), hospital costs between 1997 and 2005 rose by what percent?  
  
(a) 27 %  
(b) 41 %  
(c) 90 %  
(d) 33 %
5. None of the leading 2008 presidential candidates support a government-run, single payer health care system.  
  
(a) True  
(b) False

## FDA Concludes that Prilosec and Nexium Pose No Increased Heart Risk

The FDA has completed a comprehensive review of potential heart-related risks associated with the drugs Prilosec and Nexium. The agency research suggests no increased risk of heart problems associated with their use.

The two drugs are used to treat individuals who suffer from gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and other conditions caused by excess stomach acid. During studies on the effectiveness of these drugs, questions were raised about whether their use might contribute to an increased risk for heart attacks, heart failure, and heart-related sudden death in patients taking the medication.

Based on its review, the “FDA continues to conclude that long-term use of these drugs is not likely to be associated with an increased risk of heart problems. FDA recommends that health care providers continue to prescribe, and patients continue to use, these products as described in the labeling for the two drugs.”

The drugs are produced by AstraZeneca International.

## Stem Cell Breakthrough May Be Turning Point in Debate

Teams of Japanese and American scientist have announced their success at reprogramming and returning mature human cells to an embryonic like state. While additional research is needed, the development is seen as significant in the ongoing debate involving embryonic stem cell research because it was accomplished without destroying human embryos. This achievement is expected to help avoid the ethical and practical issues of stem cell research which have slowed its advancement.

Stem cell research provides the promise of new, fresh master stem cells being converted to tissue that may be transplanted into a patient to treat Parkinson’s disease, diabetes, and other illnesses. The recent announcement provides additional hope that transplanted tissue could be obtained from a patient’s own cells, which share the identical genetic makeup and could avoid rejection from the individual’s immune system.

Medical applications are reportedly years away and some scientists are calling for continued embryonic stem cell advancements. It is clear however, that this development has the potential of transforming the stem cell debate by eventually removing the divisive moral issues that have stymied significant advancements.

## CDC Reports Increase in Physical Activity

The CDC is reporting that more Americans are engaging in physical activity. According to the CDC, from 2001 to 2005, physical activity increased 8.6 percent among women, from 43 percent to 46.7 percent. Physical activity among men increased from 48 percent to 49.7 percent, an increase of 3.5 percent. The findings were determined based on data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a state-based, random-digit, dialed telephone survey of the noninstitutionalized, U.S. civilian population over the age of 18. Regular physical activity is known to reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, certain cancers, and premature mortality. The CDC and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that adults engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day. Despite the increases, fewer than half of the adult U.S. population engage in the recommended levels of activity. The CDC continues to encourage states to implement evidence-based intervention strategies that support increased physical activity.

Trivia answers: 1. a (True) 2. b (30 minutes) 3. a (True) 4. c (90 %) 5. a (True)

### Birthdays

#### January

- 1 – Rep. Jim Pitts
- 1 – Rep. Senfronia Thompson
- 3 – Rep. Marc Veasey
- 6 – Rep. Joe Heflin
- 6 – Rep. Armando Martinez
- 8 – Rep. Kevin Bailey
- 8 – Rep. Joe Crabb
- 8 – Rep. Rick Noriega
- 10 – Sen. Kyle Janek
- 19 – Rep. Diane Patrick
- 20 – Sen. Eddie Lucio
- 20 – Rep. Jim Keffer
- 22 – Rep. Nathan Macias