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HealthNet News

September/October 2017

Linking Connecticut Patients and Families to Reliable Health Information

In this issue: doctors promoting drugs on Twitter, the microbiome, first braille smartwatch, and more!

Cancer Doctors Get Paid to Promote Drugs on Twitter

A new study of hematologist-oncologists who use Twitter found many who are paid by drug companies tweet about drugs produced by those companies. This study also found that these tweets were more likely to be positive if the physician received payments from the drug's manufacturer. Less than two

percent of tweeting oncologists report their conflicts of interest: [oncologists are being paid](#) to promote a drug company's products but are not revealing this financial relationship to their patients. This is worrisome because cancer drugs are toxic, have terrible side-effects, and are often marginally effective. Patients can use Medicare's "[Open Payments Data](#)" website to discover whether their doctors have accepted payments from drug or device manufacturers.

The Microbiome Explained

What is the microbiome? Our bodies are hosts to trillions of microorganisms including bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses. In healthy people these microbes peacefully coexist in our gut, and throughout our bodies. Researchers have likened the microbiome to a supporting organ because it plays so many important roles in promoting the the smooth operations of our body. Would you like to learn more about the microbiome? Check out this [article](#) on Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health website. Learn how these microorganisms benefit your body, how diet can affect your microbiome, and what research is beginning to reveal about the importance of the microbiome.

Health Information en Espanol

The Agency for Health Care Quality and Research has new Spanish-language patient handouts. Spanish speakers can now find effective non-invasive treatments for [low-back pain](#) and effective treatments for [gout](#).

The evidence-based nutrition website, [Nutritionfacts.org](#) now offers [Spanish translations](#) of 400 of the site's videos. [Nutritionfacts.org](#) offers "bite-sized" discussions in plain language of what science has to say about controversial nutrition topics. Visitors to [Nutritionfacts.org](#) can toggle back and forth between English and Spanish by clicking on the appropriate flag image at the bottom of every page.

Must-Read Books for Alzheimer's Caregivers

Caring for someone with dementia is challenging. Learning as much as you can about this illness will help you solve everyday problems and improve the quality of life for both of you. Check out [DailyCaring.com](#) for the [best books](#) about

Alzheimer's and dementia. These books are recommended for both new and experienced caregivers.

First Braille Smartwatch

For people with vision or hearing impairments, braille can be essential for communicating information. Braille does not have to compete with environmental noise and it affords privacy. Now there is a smartwatch, called the "Dot" that makes Braille portable. Check out the video on the [Dot website](#) to see the amazing ways the braille watch is changing lives. The Dot is made of super-light weight aluminum with a battery that lasts for 7 days and a price tag that is just under \$300.

Getting an MRI? Be Sure to Ask About the Contrast Agent

Gadolinium is a metal dye injected into the veins to help radiologists better read an MRI scan. [Research shows](#) that magnetic resonance imaging with a gadolinium-based contrast agent, called a GBCA, leaves metal deposits in the body's organs and tissues including the brain. Doctors caution against using GBCAs in patients with kidney disease because their kidneys can not clear the heavy metal deposits. However, even patients with healthy kidneys are being sickened after injection with GBCAs. The Food and Drug Administration has voted to add a warning label on GBCAs, although patients who have been injured feel that this is not enough. Approximately 1 in 1000 people with gadolinium deposits in their body will get sick from them.

Social Networks Can Provide Reliable Information During an Emergency

During an emergency like a hurricane or an earthquake Twitter and Facebook can provide invaluable information for affected residents, distant family members, and even travelers. You may not tweet or post to Facebook, but you can still use these networking sites to keep current or to remain safe. The [New York Times](#) travel section offers a beginner's guide to finding the most helpful social media accounts for reliable, up-to-date emergency related information.

Emergency Preparedness for Seniors

Older adults may have limited mobility or health problems that make it difficult for them to get around. How safe would your older friends or relatives be during an emergency? [DailyCaring.com](https://www.dailycaring.com) offers tips for ensuring that your older relatives are safe. Learn how to build an emergency kit; form a support network; create an emergency plan; and ensure that federal benefits payments are safe and accessible.

If your parents live in a nursing home or retirement community, [NextAvenue.org](https://www.nextavenue.org) identifies the questions you should ask the administrators of those facilities to ensure they have plans in place to keep their residents safe if there is an emergency. Many states do not have strict regulations around emergency preparedness for retirement communities and skilled nursing facilities. The Assisted Living Federation of America offers an [emergency toolkit](#) to help facilities develop and design plans to respond to emergencies. The booklet will help you decide what questions to ask the administrators of your loved one's residence.

Why Can't We Lower Drug Prices?

President Trump accuses the drug industry of "getting away with murder." Numerous bills proposed by both major parties are being considered by Congress to reign in drug prices. These bills include allowing Medicare to negotiate prices for covered drugs, importing cheaper generic drugs, and restricting consumer drug ads. An angry public wants to see action. So what gives?

Kaiser Health News [reports](#) on this vexing problem. Among their findings - a drug industry that has donated over \$4.5 million dollars to congressional campaigns in 2017, including a six-figure donation to Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan. Included in the report is a link to a policy tracking database maintained by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. The Center's database includes a full list of [drug-price proposals](#).

Keeping Your Athlete Healthy

If your child participates in sports, you want to keep them healthy. In addition to helmets and padding, you should also remind your child not to share her water bottle and to remember his flip flops in the shower. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, infectious diseases sideline 10 - 15 percent of college

athletes. The Academy just released [guidelines](#) for preventing the transmission of infectious diseases among athletes. In addition to good hygiene and not sharing sports equipment, parents are reminded to ensure their child completes her series of vaccinations against infectious diseases.

More Health Information You Can Use:

- Basic health information and advice from the [Mayo Clinic](#) is now available on Amazon's Alexa-enabled devices.
- [Drones](#) are flying blood and medical samples between hospitals and testing facilities in Switzerland.
- A button-sized [posture coach](#) vibrates when you slouch and also tracks your daily activity.
- USDA's "FoodKeeper" app updates you about food recalls and alerts you when your yogurt has reached its expiration date.
- People are using Siri as a [therapist](#) so Apple is hiring engineers who understand psychology.

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