

# Senior Services News

## Drug Prices – why are they so high?

I get regular complaints from my patients about the shock they feel when their pharmacist tells them the price of the drug I have prescribed. You would think I should know what drugs cost, but I don't, because there is no set price of a drug. It varies between pharmacies and prescription drug plans. It varies year-to-year.

Robert Reich, a professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley (and former U.S. Secretary of Labor) has a concise explanation of the American pharmaceutical market in his new book "Saving Capitalism".

Once a new drug is "invented" the pharmaceutical company applies for a patent, which enables the company to have the exclusive right to produce and market that drug without competition for 20 years. However it takes an average of 8 years of expensive research and development to make sure the drug is safe and effective by Food and Drug Administration standards before the company can start selling the drug. Pharmaceutical companies will tell you that the price must therefore be high in order to recoup these high initial expenses and still make a profit.

However drug companies can often extend the duration of patent protection by producing minor changes to the original drug (such as producing a "long acting" or "sustained release" form of the drug) that can be newly patented, and the clock starts again.

It is technically illegal for Americans to shop at foreign pharmacies for their drugs, and U.S. customs may destroy these mail order shipments if they are detected (they will usually turn a blind eye to a non-narcotic drug shipment of up to 3 months supply). Although no case has been reported of counterfeit drugs from a foreign pharmacy causing harm to an American, many Americans have been harmed by not taking their medications as often as prescribed, due to cost.

Once a patent has expired, the law allows the drug company to suppress generic competition by arranging to pay the generic maker to delay production of their version of the drug. For some reason this "pay-for-delay" arrangement does not represent a price-fixing or anti-trust violation, as it would in many other countries.

The law also allows pharmaceutical companies to buy me and other physicians a meal, during which they promote their product to us. I admit I attend some of these lunches and dinners because they are informative, but I wouldn't mind if these activities had more restrictions.

Although many seniors have access to Medicare Part D coverage, Dr. Reich points out that "the law bars the U.S. government from using its considerable bargaining power to negotiate lower costs."

Now you may ask, why is the prescription drug market regulatory system set up in this way? And there lies a major part of your answer to why your medications are so expensive. In addition to research and development costs, drug companies spend millions each year on direct-to-consumer marketing, marketing to physicians, and most importantly, lobbying lawmakers and contributing to political campaigns, in order to keep the regulatory system running in their favor. Dr. Reich reports that the big pharmaceutical companies spent \$225 million on lobbying in 2013, and \$36 million on political campaigns in the 2012 election.

Drug companies and politicians often argue that to put more restrictions on drug pricing would just stifle innovation. Yet our lawmakers are quite happy to restrict payments to hospitals, social services, and other public health entities, in the supreme confidence that they will find innovative ways to remain productive and deficit-free. And we hope they will. After all, if the money is rolling in and the system is working for you, why would you innovate?

Lawren Hicks, MD  
Medical Director  
Senior Services



# Educational Opportunities

There is no charge to attend our health education events unless otherwise noted. **Registration is required.** Register early - class size is limited. Register on line at [johnmuirhealth.com](http://johnmuirhealth.com) or call 941-7900 option 1.

JULY — SEPTEMBER 2017

## Understanding Options For In-Home Care – Sara Kelly, MSW

August 4 | 9:30 - 11 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Tice Valley/Rossmoor

Sara will discuss what to consider when hiring in-home care, the difference between skilled and custodial care and what is involved in working with home care agencies and home health.

## Exercise Methods to Prevent Falls – Lori Sweet PT

August 18 | 9:30 - 11 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek

Age and health conditions can impact our balance. In addition to demonstrating exercises that will improve your balance, we will discuss improving safety at home, footwear and assistive devices.

## Facing the Challenges of Caregiving – Karen Winer, MSW

August 30 | 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Pleasanton

Providing care can be stressful, emotionally draining work. The challenges can increase as your loved one's condition changes. We will discuss how to care for yourself and your loved one as well as resources and the upcoming caregiver support group sponsored by John Muir Health Senior Services.

## Are You Experiencing Frequent Sleepless Nights? – Kathy Napoli, MA, RD

September 7 | 9:30 - 11 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | John Muir Medical Center, Concord

If so, discover how sleep impacts your overall health. Learn practical nutrition and lifestyle recommendations to help improve both the quality and quantity of your sleep for optimal health.

## Urinary Incontinence 101 – Kenneth Hsiao, MD

September 15 | 9:30 - 11 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek

Incontinence affects women and men and can often be cured or controlled. Learn the causes, how it's diagnosed, treatment options and daily management. Dr. Hsiao will talk about robotic surgery and pelvic floor reconstruction.

## Your Health 401K – Lawren Hicks, MD

September 19 | 2:30 - 4 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek

A presentation about advance planning and other non-monetary investments you should make in your future.

## Mind Body Connection – Alan Brast, Ph.D., C.C.H.T., CSA

September 21 | 10 - 11:30 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Pleasanton

This presentation will address just how our mind contributes to (or sabotages) our health and general well-being. Learn simple techniques on how to improve health and well-being by enlisting the mind as an ally rather than an adversary.

## Living with Arthritis – Ann Ferrari Ramirez, OTR, CHT

September 29 | 9:30 - 11 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Brentwood

Arthritis is a chronic disease, causing inflammation of the joints, pain, swelling and limited motion. Learn how to manage the challenges of pain and stiffness and how to maximize your ability to take part in the activities you choose.

# Ongoing Classes

## AARP Driver Safety Program

July 15 | 1 - day, 8 hour class | 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. | John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek

August 19 | refresher class | 8:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. | John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek

September 13 | refresher class | 8:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. | John Muir Medical Center, Concord

September 23 | 1 - day, 8 hour class | 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. | John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek

This Smart Driver classroom course, designed for motorists over age 50, helps drivers refine existing skills and develop safe, defensive driving techniques. Offered in an eight hour or four-and-a-half hour refresher course for those who meet the criteria for renewal. There is a charge for this class. Register online at [johnmuirhealth.com](http://johnmuirhealth.com) or call 941-7900 option 1.

## Advance Health Care Directives – Suzanne Leib, LMFT

July 18 | 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Brentwood

August 15 | 1 - 3 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Pleasanton

September 26 | 4 - 6 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | John Muir Medical Center, Concord

All adults, regardless of age, need to understand how they can have control over their own life and death decisions. Learn the choices you or your family may face due to an accident or serious illness. This is an opportunity to clarify your choices and make sure they will be carried out should you become unable to make your own health care decisions. Required documents will be provided.

## Catch Yourself – Fall Prevention to Maintain Your Independence

July 10, 12, 17, 19 | 6 – 7:30 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek

September 12, 14, 19, 21 | 10:15 - 11:45 a.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | Outpatient Center, Brentwood

This four-session class series raises awareness about falls by practicing techniques in class. Learn how to improve your strength and balance, simplify your environment, and identify fall risks. Classes will cover home safety strategies, exercise techniques, medication management, and other ways to decrease your risk of falling. Wear comfortable shoes and clothing. Plan to attend all four classes. If you have taken this class in the past 12 months, and feel you still need fall prevention information, we ask you to follow up with your primary care doctor or call Wellness Services 941-7900 option 1.

## Welcome to Medicare - Health Insurance Counseling & Advocacy Program

July 12, August 9, September 13 | 7 – 9:30 p.m. | 941-7900 option 1 | John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek

This course is for those new to Medicare, or soon to enroll, who want to understand the many benefits available. Learn about health benefits, drug coverage and how to supplement your coverage. HICAP does not sell or endorse insurance products. Register online at [johnmuirhealth.com](http://johnmuirhealth.com) or call 941-7900 option 1.

## Memory Screening - What's Your Memory Fitness?

July 11, August 8, September 12 | morning appointments | 947-3300

July 12, August 9, September 13 | afternoon appointments | 947-3300

Outpatient Centers: Brentwood | Pleasanton | Tice Valley/Rossmoor | Walnut Creek

Many people notice changes in their memory as they grow older. If you are 65 or older and have a John Muir Health primary care physician, Senior Services, in partnership with John Muir Health Neurosciences Institute, offers a free individual memory screening to help determine if your memory is functioning at a level that is typical for a person your age. This is a screening and not a diagnostic exam. Screenings are offered on the specific dates and times at the three locations listed. Call for a 30 minute appointment.



Senior Services  
 1450 Treat Blvd  
 Walnut Creek, CA 94597

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Change in information?** If you have a change in address or wish to be removed from our mailing list, please notify us at (925) 947-3300 or [seniorservices@johnmuirhealth.com](mailto:seniorservices@johnmuirhealth.com)

**John Muir Health Senior Services**

Senior Services offers a wide range of services for John Muir Health seniors including resources, information, assessment services, and educational programs. We help older adults, their families, and those who care for them. Our goal is to help older adults keep their independence and enjoy the best possible quality of life. (925) 947-3300

Outpatient Center, Brentwood  
 2400 Balfour Road, Suite 201  
 Brentwood

Outpatient Center, Pleasanton  
 5860 Owens Drive, 2nd Floor  
 Pleasanton

Outpatient Center, Tice Valley/Rossmoor  
 1220 Rossmoor Parkway, Suite 100  
 Walnut Creek

Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek  
 1450 Treat Boulevard, 2nd Floor  
 Walnut Creek

**Ready to Take Charge of Your Health?**

**John Muir Health Wellness Services can help.**

When it comes to health and wellness, one of the best ways to empower yourself and your family is by taking classes.

John Muir Health Wellness Services provides comprehensive, evidence-based patient education and resources focused on prevention and wellness. We offer our patients free classes that cover cholesterol, arthritis, weight management, gentle movement and many other topics. Ask your John Muir Health doctor about a referral to a class that addresses your health needs and interests.

Drop into our two John Muir Health Outpatient Centers to get a free blood pressure check or grab an education health flyer about a variety of health topics:

Walnut Creek: 1450 Treat Boulevard, 1st Floor  
 Pleasanton: 5860 Owens Drive, 1st Floor

For more information, call John Muir Health Wellness Services at (925) 941-7900.

**PROGRAM LOCATIONS**

John Muir Medical Center, Concord  
 2540 East St., Concord  
 (925) 682-8200

John Muir Medical Center, Walnut Creek  
 1601 Ygnacio Valley Rd., Walnut Creek  
 (925) 939-3000

Outpatient Center, Brentwood  
 2400 Balfour Rd., Brentwood  
 (925) 308-8100

Outpatient Center, Pleasanton  
 5860 Owens Dr., Pleasanton  
 (925) 224-0800

Outpatient Center, Tice Valley/Rossmoor  
 1220 Rossmoor Pkwy., Walnut Creek  
 (925) 939-1220

Outpatient Center, Walnut Creek  
 1450 Treat Blvd., Walnut Creek  
 (925) 947-3300

Wellness Services, Walnut Creek  
 1656 N. California Blvd., Ste 100  
 Walnut Creek  
 (925) 941-7900 option 1