

# THE MedicineCabinet

A newsletter from MEDPIN – Medicine For People In Need

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## Medpin Second Annual Conference

### Setting the Standard: Quality Care and Affordable Drugs

In the past three years, Medpin's Drug Distribution Project has distributed over \$170 million worth of prescription medications to safety net clinics throughout California. These drugs have helped treat uninsured patients with asthma, diabetes, mental illness, heart disease, and other ailments. We have cause to celebrate improvements in health outcomes and reductions in health costs as a direct result of this program.

How can clinics continue to increase access to needed medications for our most vulnerable populations? What tools and resources do clinics need to improve pharmacy services, reduce drug costs and improve health outcomes? Our conference will provide answers to these questions and more through keynote presentations and hands-on workshops.

#### Featured workshop sessions:

- Implementing a Statewide Drug Purchasing Alliance
- Physician and Pharmacist Teams Improve Quality of Care
- Tailoring Pharmacy Services to Clinic and Patient Needs
- Direct to Physician and Direct to Consumer Advertising: What We Can Do About It

## May 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Sheraton Universal Hotel  
Universal City, CA

- Using PAPS to Improve Patient Care: Models That Work & Questions for the Future

*Continuing Education credits provided for: Physicians, Pharmacists and Nurses.*

#### Who Should Attend?

- Leaders from safety net community clinics and county health systems
- Physicians and nurses
- Pharmacists
- Public policy leaders working at the local, state and national levels

#### Registration Fee:

Corporate rate	\$500
Non-profit and government rate	\$175
Student rate	\$50

*Scholarships Available*

For more information: [www.medpin.org](http://www.medpin.org)



## FREE Publications Now Available

### From Volunteers in Health Care (VIH):

- *A Volunteers in Health Care Guide to Overcoming Language Barriers*
- *Mental Health Field Reports: Providing Mental Health Services to the Uninsured*
- *Specialty Care Field Reports: Delivering Specialty Care to the Uninsured Using Volunteer Clinicians*

Download these publications at [www.volunteersinhealth-care.org](http://www.volunteersinhealth-care.org), or call toll-free: 1-877-844-8442.

### From California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) and *La Opinion*:

The Spanish-language newspaper, *La Opinion* and CHCF have prepared a special supplement entitled: *Entre el hogar y el hospital*.

This special edition offers objective information on California's nursing homes and includes resources that aid families in moving through the process of selecting a nursing home or alternative care option.

Available free of charge at: 1-800-278-0990

### From the California Primary Care Association (CPCA):

- *Providing Health Care to Limited English Proficient (LEP) Patients: A Manual of Promising Practices*.

This manual, for community health centers and other health care providers serving limited English proficient (LEP) patients, is a snapshot of how 12 health centers have addressed the needs of their LEP patients.

Available online at: <http://www.cPCA.org> or call 916-440-8170 to request a hard copy.

## Rx For Wellness: First Step Treatment for Hypertension

**W**hat medicine is the best first step treatment to control high blood pressure? Until recently, we did not have a simple answer to this question.

On December 18, 2002, exciting results were announced from the Antihypertensive and Lipid-Lowering Treatment to Prevent Heart Attack Trial (ALLHAT), which compared several hypertension treatment modalities. Funded primarily by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, this study compared treatment with a calcium

channel blocker (sold as Norvasc) or an angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor, (sold as Zestril or Prinivil), with diuretics. The study concludes "Thiazide-type diuretics are superior in preventing one or more major forms of coronary vascular disease (CVD) and

are less expensive. They should be preferred for first-step antihypertensive therapy."

The use of diuretics has plummeted recently, mainly in response to drug manufacturers' heavy promotion of newer, costlier drugs for the treatment of hypertension. Until this study, the

benefits of the new drugs were not systematically compared to diuretics, which were once the mainstay for therapy to lower blood pressure. Leaders of the study say that wider use of diuretics could save patients and health insurers more than

\$1 billion a year. Health officials have cautioned patients to consult their physician before changing any medications.

For more information visit the ALLHAT website at:

<http://allhat.sph.uth.tmc.edu/>



Lifelong Medical Center, Berkeley, CA  
Photographer: Michelle Vignes

## Responding to Direct-to-Consumer Drug Advertising

How can health care providers educate patients to view direct to consumer ads to distinguish between product marketing and balanced scientific information? Providers recognize that the newest and most expensive drugs are contributing to dramatic increases in pharmaceutical expenditures and need resources to address the problem.

June Glenn-Lawson, MD, at Tri-City Health Center in Fremont, uses a smart shopping analogy to educate her patients about the cost-effectiveness of selecting generic drugs over brand-name drugs. Glenn-Lawson reports that most of her patients recognize that the same company making the brand-name product often makes the supermarket "house" brand. Consumers want the "best-buy." Chuck Cadis, PharmD, chief of pharmacy at Northeast Valley Health Corporation in Los Angeles, reports that the major drawback in dispensing generic drugs is that different manufacturers products vary and that this variation can be confusing to patients. To allay concerns, Cadis makes certain to alert patients to any changes at the time of refill. Reassuring patients that these small differences do not affect the drug's action increases acceptance of the generic drugs and provides good value.

Medpin has a limited supply of Consumers Guide to Generic Drugs, developed by the National Consumers League with an educational grant from Medco Health Solutions, Inc. You can order a free supply by emailing [info@medpin.org](mailto:info@medpin.org) with your request. Be sure to include quantity (up to 500 copies) and your mailing address. You can also download the brochure from the National Consumers League website at <http://www.nclnet.org/Generics.pdf>.

The California HealthCare Foundation is convening a policy advisory board for their education campaign on direct to consumer (DTC) advertised prescription drugs. The goal is to provide consumers with credible, easily understood information about the most commonly advertised drugs.

Here are some other readily available tools and resources specifically designed to educate consumers about high quality alternatives to costly new drugs.

### Websites:

- <http://www.theunadvertisedbrand.com/>
- <http://www.oregonrx.org/>
- <http://www.aarp.org/wisuse/oregon-research.html>

# Medpin's Campaign to Sustain Safety Net Clinics' Access to Free Drugs

Medpin has worked with 25 major drug companies to distribute a variety of free drugs to outpatient county clinics and nonprofit community clinics ranging in size from the Los Angeles County Health Services Department to small nonprofit clinics in rural Northern California. Medpin's free drugs have been helping these clinics care for low-income people with asthma, diabetes, mental illness, heart disease, and other ailments. By getting the medications that are part of timely, outpatient care, these uninsured patients benefit through better health, and California taxpayers benefit from reductions in costly and inappropriate emergency room use. That was the assumption underlying a creative class action settlement that created Medpin's drug distribution activities, which are winding down because the participating companies' legal obligation is ending.

As the DDP comes to an end, Medpin is sending letters signed by the California Primary Care Association, California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems and the executive directors of nine regional clinic consortia to all the participating pharmaceutical companies thanking them for their involvement in this innovative program. Medpin is also calling



on these companies to demonstrate their continued concern for indigent patients by publicly committing to:

1. Release figures on the total annual value and number of prescriptions (or 30 day supplies) of that company's outpatient drugs provided at no charge to California patients through the company's own medication assistance program(s) during the same time that the DDP has been operational.
2. Publicly commit to provide the same total annual value of the company's products at no cost to indigent California patients in the near future as has been provided in the recent past.

3. Release to an appropriate public agency or independent nonprofit organization sufficient information to verify the company's success in meeting or exceeding commitment #2.

4. Pledge to help medically and financially vulnerable Californians fill their prescriptions regardless of age or Medicare eligibility status.

5. Send at least one knowledgeable and responsible company representative to meet at least once per year with leaders from California's public and private nonprofit "safety net" clinics, to review and discuss successes and challenges in meeting each of the above four commitments.

## Best Buys

### FEBRUARY

Drugs to treat congestion, constipation, high blood pressure and ulcers

*Guaifenisin Syrup, 4oz*  
005336-0825-97 \$0.31

*Lactulose, 240ml*  
00591-2519-38 \$0.15

*Triamterene/HCTZ, 75/50mg #100*  
00378-1353-01 \$1.05

*Furosemide, 80mg #100*  
00054-4301-25 \$0.49

*Ranitidine, 150mg #60*  
00781-1883-60 \$0.99

## Looking to Buy a "Best Buy?"

Medpin doesn't sell or distribute drugs. You must work with a drug wholesaler or directly with a pharmaceutical company to buy drugs. Best Buys prices are generally available only to clinics that are 340B eligible. To find out more about the 340B program and how to participate go to our website at [www.medpin.org](http://www.medpin.org) and click on Low Cost Drugs.

## Using PAPs More Effectively

As Medpin's Drug Distribution Project draws to an end, clinics must look to other sources for free and reduced cost drugs. Many clinics that have used pharmaceutical companies' patient assistance programs (PAPs) to access free drugs for their patients are considering how to expand their use of these programs.

Medpin is conducting phone interviews with selected clinics to learn more about their systems for increasing access to PAPs. We are interested in evaluating the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of PAP assistance services ranging from no-cost software programs such as the Volunteers in HealthCare (VIH) RxAssist Plus to fee-based soft-

ware programs and services such as MedData and Indicare.

**POST-  
DDP**

Medpin's survey expands on the work of VIH, which recently completed a survey of PAP software vendors. The VIH survey compares features of the different software programs and services and is available in a simple chart format on their website

<http://www.volunteersinhealthcare.org/home.htm>

. Results of Medpin's study from the end-users' perspective will be available April 2003. Together, these surveys provide essential information to assist clinics and hospitals in choosing PAP software programs and services that best meet their needs.

**PLEASE ROUTE TO:**

- \_\_\_\_ Executive Director
- \_\_\_\_ Medical Director
- \_\_\_\_ Clinic Manager
- \_\_\_\_ Nurse Manager
- \_\_\_\_ Pharmacist

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## Oregon Identifies Cost-Effective Prescription Drugs

The Oregon Health Resources Commission is a component of the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) to help OHP achieve its goal of assuring all Oregonians access to high quality, effective health care at an affordable cost, whether that care is purchased by the state or by the private sector. A 2001 law directs the Department of Human Services to adopt a Practitioner-Managed Prescription Drug Plan.

The commission contracted with the Evidence-Based Practice Center of Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU EPC) to review four different classes of prescription drugs, including anti-ulcer and heartburn drugs, cholesterol-lowering drugs, anti-inflammatory medication used commonly for pain and inflammation (such as arthritis symptoms), and long-acting opioid pain killers. OHSU EPC identifies and

assesses peer-reviewed studies and produces evidence-based reviews on these four drug classes.

The reviews provide the basis of a consumer and prescriber guide for prescription drugs to help patients and their doctors choose the best drugs at the best price.

Summaries of those evaluations are available through the Commission's website:

<http://www.oregonrx.org/OHPPRREPORTS.htm>.

Or check out the consumer friendly AARP - Oregon website at:

<http://www.aarp.org/wiseuse/oregon-research.html>

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