

## MEDICAL BRIEFS

## Drug costs

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan is providing cost-comparison information on 25 of the most common brand name drugs with generic counterparts on its Web site at [www.bcbsm.com/generic/](http://www.bcbsm.com/generic/).

The information was originally developed as a handy reference card for physicians. To reach more consumers, the Blues has posted the card on its Web site. The card lists the average wholesale price for the brand name drugs and the price the Blues pay for the generic form of the drugs.

The cards can help consumers without health insurance as well. Prices of individual drugs can vary, sometimes dramatically, depending on the pharmacy. It is recommended that consumers use a single pharmacy to obtain all of their medications if possible, which helps in tracking the use of multiple prescriptions and avoiding drug interactions.

Generics are less expensive than brand-name drugs and must meet the Food and Drug Administration's standards for safety and quality. Manufacturers must prove their products have the same effect as brand-name drugs.

## Medical study

A Wayne State University School of Medicine study shows that American physicians are more likely than their Canadian counterparts to administer a drug to stroke patients that has been proven ineffective and potentially dangerous.

Dr. Seemant Chaturvedi, WSU associate professor of neurology, surveyed 290 U.S. and 283 Canadian neurologists about their reactions to patients in five different scenarios as well as their attitudes about the legal implications of their actions. U.S. neurologists were significantly more likely to administer intravenous heparin, a blood thinner that has been proven ineffective and potentially dangerous in about 2 percent of cases where bleeding in the brain develops as the result of heparin use.

Thirty-three percent of American doctors versus 11 percent of Canadian doctors cited medico-legal factors as a potential influence on the decision-making involved in administering IV heparin.

## Breast cancer

An experimental internal radiation therapy for early-stage breast cancer patients studied at Beaumont Hospital has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Beaumont was among the first in the world to treat patients using the MammoSite Radiation Therapy System.

The treatment delivers radiation directly to the site of the removed tumor and the area immediately surrounding it, where the vast majority of tumors recur. The treatment decreases the duration of radiation therapy from seven weeks to five days, and avoids treatment to healthy breast tissue and reactions to external beam radiation such as skin irritation.

Only 40 percent of eligible breast cancer patients are treated with a lumpectomy compared with mastectomy, or removal of the breast. Another benefit to MammoSite's shorter treatment time is preventing the delay of chemotherapy, if that treatment is necessary.

# SUN!

## Protect yourself against damaging rays

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI  
SPECIAL WRITER

Rob Ritter, pool supervisor for Westland Parks and Recreation, says he and other lifeguards battle a double dose of the sun — once from above and a second time when the rays reflect back up from the water to the stand where they keep watch.

He wears sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor of 45.

"I make sure to drink a lot of water and to take breaks out of the sun, because we are open from 12-7 p.m. and from 12 to 4 are the peak sun hours," he said. "It can get pretty hot out there."

Ritter recommends that his lifeguards wear sunscreen with at least 15 SPF and tries to make sure they drink enough water to stay hydrated.

"We close the pool from 3-4 p.m. They can do what they want, and they're not constantly in the sun," he said.

Michelle DuMars, Livonia recreation supervisor, worked as a lifeguard for six years and always made sure she wore sunglasses and a hat or visor, applied sunscreen twice a day and made sure the umbrella was up over her stand.

"It became routine," she said.

Ritter and DuMars follow many of the doctor-recommended suggestions to avoid the negative effects of the sun:

- Applying sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 about 20 minutes before exposure with special attention to ear rims, back of the neck and tops of the feet;

- Reapplying sunscreen every two hours after being in the water and after exercising and sweating;

- Wearing sunglasses to protect against cataracts;

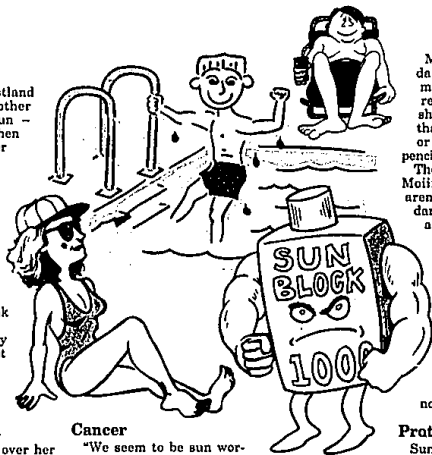
- Limiting exposure during mid-day when the sun's rays are the most direct; and
- Conducting self-exams, looking for cancerous spots and going to a dermatologist to have suspicious-looking spots checked.

Doctors aren't saying to avoid the sun altogether, but too much exposure to solar rays is linked to wrinkles and skin cancer.

Researchers say the sun's rays are more deadly than ever before because the depleted ozone layer — which acts as a protective screen — has been thinning. Last year 9,600 people in the United States died from skin cancer, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. More than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed this year.

"I've been seeing more people with melanoma," said Dr. Arthur Gulick, who has a dermatology practice in Plymouth.

Doctors warn that children before 18 have a three fold chance of getting cancer, said Dr. Ali Moïni of A Comprehensive Dermatology Center in Livonia and Troy.



## Cancer

"We seem to be sun worshippers not reflecting on the dangers of sun exposure," said Dr. Michelle Hardaway, a Southfield plastic surgeon. "Two main categories of people are generally at risk of contracting skin cancer: Those that sun bathe and people who work outdoors, such as highway construction workers, landscapers and others."

The three most common kinds of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, which accounts for about 80 percent of all skin cancers in the United States; squamous cell carcinoma; and melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

The basal type is "quite treatable," said Gulick, adding that this type of cancer tends to have a reddish look.

"Melanoma is the most aggressive and most deadly," he said, explaining that the cancerous cells have a great propensity to break-off and go to distant parts of the body. "That's why it's so important to detect it and treat it early on."

**■ Gulick recommends checking the skin of your entire body with a full-length mirror three or four times a year and to look for new spots and changes in old ones.**

Gulick recommends checking the skin of your entire body with a full-length mirror three or four times a year and look for new spots and changes in old ones. Use a smaller mirror, to reflect in the larger one, to view your back. If the job seems too cumbersome ask someone for help, he added.

Melanoma is characteristically black or dark brown. When checking your body you might use the acronym, ABCD, to help you remember what to look for. Asymmetric shapes. Borders that are irregular. Color that is dark, but can also be pink, whitish or bluish. Diameter that is wider than a pencil eraser.

There are some exceptions to the rules, said Moïni. For instance, dark-skinned people aren't risk free and the cancer isn't always dark in color. However, fair skinned people are at the highest risk.

A few months ago Gulick treated a man with a large pink area on his back.

"It looked strange to me and we took a biopsy," he said. "Sure enough it was (cancerous). We've been able to prove that sunscreens have been able to prevent certain kinds of skin cancer, but some folks are worried that sunscreens will encourage some people to stay out in the sun longer and they will get more sun than they normally would."

## Protecting against risks

Sun exposure can be risky for skin appearance, causing premature wrinkling. Chronic sun exposure causes an accumulation of elastin under the skin, which can cause wrinkles.

According to Environmental Health & Safety Online: "Avoid sunbaths and tanning parlors. Sun beds damage the skin and unprotected eyes and are best avoided entirely. At the very least, they age your skin by breaking down the collagen in your skin, making it lose the youthful elastic appearance."

There are also people who get rashes when exposed to the sun. They may be allergic to the rays and should avoid the sun altogether. Only between 5-10 percent of the U.S. population has this problem, and many don't even know that's why they're getting the rashes, Moïni said.

Basically, the goal is to avoid sunbaths and especially sunburns, said Moïni, who also works out of Harper Hospital in Detroit.

Another precaution is to wear clothing and sunglasses with ultraviolet protection labels, like those provided by Solar Zone Sunwear, which claims to provide 98 percent or more protection of UV.

Some clothing dyes, like those offered by RIT, also offer added filters from the sun.

After protecting yourself from the risks, consider that the sun also provides a lot of benefits, like giving our bodies Vitamin D and by having a dramatic affect on our moods. Some people are influenced more than others by the sun. They are considered to have seasonal affective disorder, SAD.

"Going outside in the sun and doing everything outside is good for us, especially for Michigan people," Moïni said. "How much time do we have to do it?"

## Heart attack

### Knowing the warning signs can save your life

Father's Day is over, but it's not too late to give Dad the gift of a lifetime. It won't cost you a cent, just your time. Take your dad out to lunch and talk about the warning signs of a heart attack and stroke. It may just save his life.

Ron Young of Plymouth is a 57-year-old man with two grown children and two grandchildren. Except for high blood pressure, he never had any health problems. Lucky for him, however, he recognized the warning signs of a heart attack and got the help he needed.

Ron began having chest pains one day. When they continued, he went to his doctor, who sent him directly to the emergency room. Ron was in the process of having a heart attack. A few days later, he was in the operating room undergoing an angioplasty procedure to clear out several blocked arteries. If Ron had not

gone to his doctor when he did, he may not be here to tell about his experience.

"I encourage all men to learn the warning signs of a heart attack and take action," he said.

Ron's action also saved the life of his twin brother, Bob, who lives in Florida. When Bob found out what happened to Ron, he went straight to his doctor and requested a stress test. He was told he had a potentially fatal blockage in the left main artery. Bob is lucky. The blockage was corrected by a double coronary bypass. His surgery was in March, and Bob is now back to work.

"My brother had no symptoms, so I am glad he saw his doctor when he did," said Ron.

Bob's doctor predicted he probably would have died

Please see HEART, C5



Happy family: Bob Young (left) and Ron Young pose for a photo last Thanksgiving with their sister, Becky Hetu (left, seated) and mother, Carol Young.

## Making connections

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Database (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointments/new hires in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories.

To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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