Publications & Reports

Data Source

EBRI Health Benefits Databook, First Edition was released by the Employee Benefit Research Institute in December 1999. The 200-page book contains more than 200 tables and charts, with time-trend data on health spending, public opinion, health care benefits spending, health insurance coverage, design features of health benefits plans, retiree health benefits, and Medicare. The data range from 1948 to 1999. A valuable appendix contains summaries of major health insurance legislation from 1939 through 1998.

Copies are available for $59.95 each from EBRI, Suite 600, 2121 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037-1896, tel.: 202-659-0670.

Medicare

Extending Medicare coverage for five specific services is the subject of three Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports, released in December 1999. Extending Medicare Coverage for Preventive and Other Services finds that (1) “direct evidence” of the effectiveness of skin cancer screening is “insufficient” to support “a new program” for screening of asymptomatic beneficiaries; (2) evidence to support coverage of medically necessary dental services varied depending on the related medical condition; therefore, Congress should update the statutory language “to clearly allow coverage” of these services; and (3) “the rationale for eliminating the current time limits for coverage of immuno-suppressive drugs for all solid organ transplant recipients is strong.” Extending Medicare Reimbursement in Clinical Trials recommends that (4) Medicare pay for beneficiaries’ routine care in clinical trials in the same way that it does for beneficiaries not in trials, and The Role of Nutrition in Maintaining Health in the Nation’s Elderly recommends that (5) Medicare cover both inpatient and outpatient nutrition therapy, upon referral by a physician.

Copies of the “preventive services” report are available for $62.75 each ($50.20 each, if ordered through the Web); the “clinical trials” report, $18 ($14.40 Web price); and the “nutrition services” report, $33 ($26.40 Web price), from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20055, tel.: 888-624-8422 (toll-free) or 202-334-3313, Web site: www.nap.edu.

Out-of-Pocket Spending by Medicare Beneficiaries Age 65 and Older: 1999 Projections, by AARP, estimates that prescription drugs accounted for “the single largest component” of beneficiaries’ out-of-pocket health spending in 1999, “after premium payments.” Further, beneficiaries spent as much out of pocket for prescription drugs as they did for physician care, vision services, and medical supplies combined. Overall out-of-pocket health spending was $2,430 per beneficiary, and beneficiaries with Medigap coverage spent even more—$3,250, on average—“in part because of the cost of Medigap premiums.” All of the estimates exclude out-of-pocket spending on home care and long-term nursing home services.


Mental Health

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General calls upon the nation “to tear down the most formidable obstacle to future progress” in treating mental illness—stigma. Mental illness is the “second leading cause” of disability and premature death and accounts for more than 15 percent of the overall disease burden from all causes (1990 data, in established market economies). Nevertheless, stigma prevents nearly two-thirds of persons with mental disorders from seeking treatment and partially accounts for the public’s reluctance to pay for mental health services, through insurance premiums or taxes. The report, released in December 1999 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), suggests that stigma could be reduced
by “furnishing empirically based information” that delinks mental illness and violence, and by continuing to “find causes and effective treatments for mental disorders.”

Copies are available for $51 each from Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954, tel.: 202-512-1800, or online: www.surgongeneral.gov. Free copies of the Executive Summary are available by calling the surgeon general’s mental health information line: 1-877-9-mhealth.

### Pharmaceuticals

**Pharmaceuticals: Rx for the Graying of America**, by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), reports that more than 600 medicines to treat diseases of aging are in the pipeline. Among these are nineteen new drugs for Alzheimer’s disease, twenty-one for stroke, sixty-three for breast cancer, ten for Parkinson’s disease, eighteen for osteoporosis, and twenty-eight for arthritis. “Ironically,” says PhRMA, “the debate on enhancing prescription drug coverage for seniors has engendered proposals that would hinder the ability of the pharmaceutical industry to develop such medicines. Examples include proposals to “extend government price controls to more than 40 percent of the market” and “legislation to allow the government to set [drug] prices...for Medicare beneficiaries.” PhRMA calls for (1) “adequate support for basic biomedical research”; (2) “strong protection of intellectual property,” both here and abroad; (3) “rigorous regulation of pharmaceuticals; and (4) “market-based delivery of health care, a principle that should govern the strengthening and improvement of Medicare.”

Free copies of the September 1999 report are available from PhRMA, tel.: 202-835-3470.

### Quality Of Care

**To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System** reveals that medical errors in U.S. hospitals kill 44,000–98,000 people a year. This is more than die in a given year from motor vehicle accidents (43,458), breast cancer (42,297), or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) (16,516). Medication-related errors are estimated to increase hospital costs by about $2 billion a year. All medical errors combined are estimated to cost $17–$29 billion a year, of which more than half is for health care. The IOM, which released the 239-page report in December 1999, recommends the creation of a Center for Patient Safety within the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), a nationwide mandatory reporting system, and safety systems within health care organizations. The report is the first in the IOM project, Quality of Health Care in America.

Copies are available for $34.95 each from National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20055, tel.: 888-624-8422 (toll free) or 202-334-3313, Web site: www.nap.edu.

### Books Received


Empowering Health Care Consumers through Tax Reform, edited by Grace-Marie Arnett (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 263 pp., $39.50 (cloth), $27.95 (paper).


**The Meanings of the Gene: Public Debates about Human Heredity**, by Celeste Michelle Condit (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 325 pp., $49.95 (cloth), $19.95 (paper).