

Here are this week's health care news highlights from AskaPatient:

- Private health plans pay out 2 to 4 times more money for hospital services than Medicare pays for the same services. <http://ow.ly/Ztm630oIfI6> (05-13-19)
- Human lungs are home to a newly identified family of viruses which are present at higher levels in critically ill patients. <http://ow.ly/hNkf30oIfnm> (05-13-19)
- Dozens of states file joint lawsuit against drugmakers for working together to inflate and control generic drug prices. <http://ow.ly/96dl30oIfvn> (05-13-19)
- Chronic emotional stress can disrupt the normal heart rhythm, leading to more serious health problems over time. <http://ow.ly/R0dC30oIfxM> (05-14-19)
- Commonly used food additive negatively impacts gut bacteria which can cause inflammation and colorectal cancer. <http://ow.ly/DSxR30oIXFq> (05-14-19)
- Rare genetic mutation protects against heart disease, but at the price of a higher risk of fatty liver disease. <http://ow.ly/uAun30oIXFK> (05-14-19)
- New treatment method starves triple negative breast cancer by shutting down two main energy sources. <http://ow.ly/Sl6330oIXG2> (05-15-19)
- Single dose of prophylactic antibiotics after assisted childbirth prevents half of infections and reduces overall antibiotic use. <http://ow.ly/vtR230oJzqZ> (05-15-19)
- WHO releases first guidelines for preventing dementia, with exercise and not smoking topping the list. <http://ow.ly/caq230oJzoX> (05-15-19) (see related article below)
- California jury rules against Monsanto for third time in a row, awarding a couple \$2 billion in punitive damages. <http://ow.ly/vcID30oJzB0> (05-16-19)
- Certain antibiotics may increase risk of neuropathy by nearly 50 percent for 6 months after treatment. <http://ow.ly/KLD930oJzH2> (05-16-19)
- Sugary drink sales drop 38 percent in Philadelphia after initiation of soda tax. <http://ow.ly/62cZ30oKfND> (05-16-19)
- CVS to launch program that requires all supplements it sells to undergo third party testing. <http://ow.ly/FL7x30oKfOX> (05-17-19)
- Pick up the pace: huge study finds faster walkers have a much longer life expectancy than slower steppers. <http://ow.ly/3af030oKILs> (05-17-19)
- New laser microscope has the ability to diagnose diseases and perform precise surgeries without cutting skin. <http://ow.ly/vLC230oKIPs> (05-17-19)
- Researchers identify a gene that increases risk of fainting by up to 30 percent. <http://ow.ly/AyrP30oKIXk> (05-18-19)

New guidelines aim to reduce the number of cases of dementia by lowering risk factors

This week, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the release of a 96-page report: *Risk reduction of cognitive decline and dementia, a set of guidelines for behaviors and interventions that aim to delay or prevent cognitive decline and dementia.*

Dementia is a rapidly growing public health problem. **According to WHO, around 50 million people have dementia and, with one**

new case every three seconds, the number of people with dementia is set to triple to 152 million in the next 30 years. It is also a global problem; about 60% of people with dementia live in low and middle-income countries. Since there is no cure for the condition, WHO says it is imperative to focus on modifiable risk factors in order to delay the onset or slow the progression of the disease.

Risk reduction is just one of seven action areas identified by WHO as part of their *Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia 2017-2025*. The other **six areas of action** include: strengthening information systems for dementia; diagnosis, treatment and care; supporting the caregivers of people with dementia; and research and innovation.

Twelve interventions to reduce the risk of cognitive decline/dementia were identified and evaluated by WHO. For nine of them, a recommendation for the intervention was qualified as either "strong" or "conditional" for adults with normal cognition and adults with mild cognitive impairment. **Strong recommendations** imply that most people should follow the recommended intervention.

Conditional recommendations imply that different choices may be appropriate for individual patients. In three of the twelve interventions, the committee determined that there was **insufficient evidence** to recommend them specifically for reducing the risk of cognitive decline and/or dementia. However, for quality of life, all of the interventions may be very important, even if there is not sufficient evidence that they will reduce the risk of cognitive decline:

Interventions Strongly Recommended

1. **Regular exercise or physical activity** (*this recommendation is "conditional" for adults with mild cognitive impairment*)
2. **Quitting smoking**
3. **Managing high blood pressure**
4. **Managing diabetes with medications and /or lifestyle interventions**

Interventions Conditionally Recommended

1. **Weight management**
2. **Reducing unhealthy cholesterol levels**
3. **Healthy diet (balanced diet such as Mediterranean-like diet)**
4. **Stopping harmful alcohol use**
5. **Cognitive interventions (cognitive stimulation or cognitive training)**

Interventions with Insufficient Evidence

1. **Use of antidepressants for the management of depression**
2. **Management of hearing loss through use of hearing aids**
3. **Staying socially active**

Sources and More Reading:

- **News release from WHO on the risk reduction guidelines:** <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/14-05-2019-adopting-a-healthy-lifestyle-helps-reduce-the-risk-of-dementia>

May 14, 2019 news release provides an overview of the newly released guidelines. The bottom line recommendation is to have a healthy lifestyle.

- **WHO Guidelines for Risk Reduction of Cognitive Decline and Dementia**

https://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/guidelines_risk_reduction/en/

96-page report provides research methodology, glossary, participants on the committees, literature review terms, and more information about each of the reviewed interventions. The "quality of evidence" assessment supporting the recommendations are also provided in the report.

- **"Regular crosswords and number puzzles linked to sharper brain in later life:"** Science Daily, May 16, 2019:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190516082349.htm>

Reports highlights of a study recently published in the *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. Conducted by the University of Exeter Medical School and King's College London, it involved over 19,000 cognitively healthy participants between the ages of 50 and 93.

The participants reported how frequently they performed number puzzles such as Sudoku and word puzzles such as crossword puzzles. They were given online cognitive tests that assessed 14 cognitive areas including attention, reasoning, and memory. "For each measure, the group who never performed word puzzles performed most poorly, with the group who reported occasional puzzle use also performing more poorly than virtually every other group."

Dr. Anne Corbett, lead researcher said, "We can't say that playing these puzzles necessarily reduces the risk of dementia in later life but this research supports previous findings that indicate regular use of word and number puzzles helps keep our brains working better for longer."

(Journal abstracts: "The relationship between the frequency of number-puzzle use and baseline cognitive function in a large online sample of adults aged 50 and over." [Int J Geriatr Psychiatry](#). 2019 Feb 11. doi: 10.1002/gps.5085. "An online investigation of the relationship between the frequency of word puzzle use and cognitive function in a large sample of older adults." [Int J Geriatr Psychiatry](#). 2019 Feb 11. doi: 10.1002/gps.5085.)

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