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Here are some recent health care stories from AskaPatient's news feed:

- [Ebola outbreak is declared a public health emergency](#)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the **Ebola outbreak** in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). There have been 2,512 confirmed or probable cases and 1,670 deaths so far. Previous PHEICs have included H1N1 swine flu in 2009, polio and Ebola in 2014, and Zika in 2016.

- [How Biden and Sanders ideas about health care differ](#)

Presidential hopefuls Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and former Vice President Joe Biden would take separate paths on how to address health care, with Sanders going for an overhaul approach and Biden favoring building on what exists.

- [For years, insurers have been overbilling Medicare by billions of dollars](#)

The federal government is trying to recoup at least part of the money, which is at least \$30 billion over the last three years. Some Medicare Advantage plans overbill the government by exaggerating how sick their patients are or by charging Medicare for treating serious medical conditions they cannot prove their patients have.

- [Try learning several new things all at once for maximum brain benefit](#)

In a study, older adults who took three weekly classes covering three different kinds of learning experiences increased their cognitive abilities to levels similar to those of middle aged adults 30 years younger.

- [Four executives from Ohio drug wholesale distributor arrested and charged with fueling the opioid epidemic](#)

Miami-Luken, along with four of its former executives and two West Virginia pharmacists, were charged with conspiring to distribute opioids. They are accused of shipping millions of oxycodone and hydrocodone pain reliever pills between 2008 and 2011 to small West Virginia towns. Miami-Luken, no longer in business, was the only one of five drug wholesalers [who admitted before Congress](#) that its actions had contributed to the opioid epidemic.

- [Common medications can masquerade as dementia in seniors](#)

A woman, in her late 60s, appeared to have severe dementia. But Dr. Malaz Boustani, a professor of aging research at Indiana University School of Medicine, suspected something else might be going on, based on the drugs the woman was taking. These included Benadryl, Seroquel, urinary incontinence drugs, and gastrointestinal drugs.

- [Canada opposes any U.S. plans for U.S. to buy their prescription drugs](#)

Canada fears that a drug shortage or increased costs for its own citizens could result from such a plan. Ten U.S. states have passed or proposed laws to allow the imports, but federal approval is still needed for legal shipments to happen.

- [Drug overdose deaths in the U.S. have fallen for the first time since 1999](#)

Preliminary data show that deaths from natural and semi-synthetic opioids - painkillers like morphine, codeine and oxycodone - fell by 14.5%, the sharpest drop for any drug category. However, those linked to synthetic opioids like fentanyl still rose.

[Comparing Doctor Ratings Sites](#)

When looking for a physician, doctor review sites can be one good source of information for consumers to use in combination with word-of-mouth recommendations, insurance company referrals, medical board checks, and more. Here are descriptions of three popular doctor rating sites, along with some things to consider about each. Our "overall ease of use" critique is based on using the site from a desktop computer. The experience from a mobile device may differ.

Consumers' Checkbook

checkbook.org

Patient ratings (five-star scale) and comments are provided for primary care doctors and dentists practicing in the seven metropolitan areas where Consumers' Checkbook magazine is published. Specialists and other practicing physicians in the U.S. are included in the database but don't have consumer ratings or comments. However, physicians "most often recognized by their peers" receive a special designation based on doctor responses to a survey that Checkbook conducts. The site also covers healthcare-related providers like acupuncturists and chiropractors, along with home services like plumbing and appliance repair.

Cost: \$28 for a one-year subscription (discounts for multi-year subscriptions), covering seven metropolitan areas. (Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, Seattle-Tacoma, Twin Cities, and Washington DC). Members also receive printed guides and a magazine.

Overall ease of use: Very easy to use and navigate. Look up physicians by name or browse by location and/or specialty. Your subscription only allows you to rate the physicians and other service providers in your metropolitan area.

Validation and confidentiality: Reviews must be made by member-submitted paper forms or online forms. Doctors are not notified about any reviews received or the identity of the reviewers. Removal or editing requests are considered by staff.

No conflict of interest: Checkbook is an independent non-profit organization, takes no corporate donations, and is 100% supported by member subscriptions and donations. Doctors may not purchase profiles or advertise.

Healthgrades

healthgrades.com

This enormous database contains more than eight million reviews for licensed U.S. physicians and dentists. Patient ratings (five-star scale) and comments are included. The chief executive officer and the president of Healthgrades are both former executives from WebMD.

Cost: free to patients; doctors pay for profile and "patient engagement resources" that include a system for collecting and monitoring patient reviews.

Overall ease of use: Very easy to use and look up physicians by name or browse by location and/or specialty.

Validation and confidentiality: No account is required, but all reviews go through a validation process: you must submit your email address or phone number to validate your review. Names are not required. Doctors have the opportunity to respond to patient satisfaction surveys, and web site users may view doctor responses. Healthgrades staff may remove a survey after a doctor has flagged it if they deem it violates editorial policy. Patients don't have the ability to edit their reviews.

Potential conflict of interest: Healthgrades sells services to physicians, including an appointment-making service and advertising, so it is likely that those paying for these services will have more favorable profiles on the site.

RateMDS

ratemds.com

Contains about 2 million doctor and dentist ratings. Patient ratings (five-star scale) and comments are included. The "FAQ" section includes some questions and answers related to negative reviews and libel concerns.

Cost: free to patients; as with Healthgrades, doctors may pay for advertising on their profiles.

Overall ease of use: When you go to the site, it automatically places you in search-lookup mode for your geographic area, based on your computer's location. It is difficult to search by city, specialty and name, as the different form fields are in separate parts of the page. The site contains a lot of advertising, making it difficult to use at first. Search results are not presented in a user-friendly fashion; advertised doctors show up first without any location information.

Validation and confidentiality: This site allows the most anonymity of the three major sites profiled here. Users may submit ratings **without** creating an account and without email or text verification. However, the web site uses other means, such as using IP address and computer identity to detect if you have submitted a review more than once. Optionally, users may create an account, allowing them to track reviews and edit their ratings over time. RateMDS lets doctors hide up to 3 ratings on their profile that they deem to be suspicious. However, the actual rating score will still be represented in the average star rating score.

Potential conflict of interest: RateMDS sells its services to physicians, including an appointment-making service and

advertising, and doctors paying for advertising tend to show up first in search results.

Here are four additional options to check out, along with some caveats:

AngiesList.com Don't expect anonymity; while your name and address may not be visible to other members, AngiesList notifies doctors when they are reviewed and also provides them with your name and address.

Zocdoc.com This is primarily an appointment-making service; only doctors who pay to participate will have any reviews, and they skew to the positive.

Vitals.com Site is on the slow side and cumbersome to navigate; they have an unusual rule that you may not email or save electronically a doctor profile; only emailing a link is allowed.

Yelp.com You need an account to add a review; easy to use; contains business listings and reviews for many doctors.

More Reading:

From *Consumer Reports*, "[What you don't know about your doctor could hurt you.](#)" April 20, 2016. Also includes "Smart Ways to Choose a Doctor."

Coming soon: *Surgeon and surgery research*

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