

## News Highlights:

- Japanese drug company Eisai agreed to remove its weight loss drug **Belviq (lorcaserin)** from the U.S. market due to studies showing an increased cancer risk. The FDA concluded its review of Belviq's clinical trials data and asked for the drug's withdrawal.

<http://www.startribune.com/weight-loss-drug-belviq-pulled-from-market-over-cancer-risk/567850982/>

**Belviq patient reviews:** <https://www.askapatient.com/viewrating.asp?drug=22529&name=BELVIQ>

- Twenty-one states rejected an **\$18 billion settlement proposal** from three major **U.S. drug distributors** (AmerisourceBergen, McKesson, and Cardinal Health) to resolve the more than **2,500 state and local government lawsuits** over their alleged role in the **opioid crisis**. The distributors had offered \$1 billion a year for 18 years, but the states want up to \$32 billion and they want it paid in a shorter amount of time.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-opioids-litigation/u-s-states-reject-18-billion-proposal-to-settle-opioid-lawsuits-discussions-ongoing-sources-idUSKBN2081YQ>

- There are currently **71,265 confirmed cases** and **1,773 deaths** from the **coronavirus COVID-19** outbreak as of February 17, 2020, 00:25 GMT.

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-cases/>

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says it will begin testing for cases of the new corona virus in five cities: **Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago and New York City**. Patients with flu-like respiratory systems who test negative for flu will now be tested for the new corona virus.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-influenza-usa/u-s-health-officials-to-start-testing-for-coronavirus-in-five-states-idUSKBN2082BP>

- CNN reported that some health experts are critical of **World Health Organization's** praise of China's response to the coronavirus and that they are questioning the relationship between the WHO and China.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/14/asia/coronavirus-who-china-intl-hnk/index.html>

In a related story, **Science Magazine** interviewed **WHO Director-General** Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and covered some of the problems WHO faces. For instance, while member countries pay annual fees, that revenue has been flat for years, and much of WHO's funding is donated by groups like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. These donations are earmarked for specific uses and not for emergencies that may arise. The fight against Ebola had taught him a clear strategy: "Focus on the epicenter," Tedros said. "If you have several epicenters, it is chaos."

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/02/mission-impossible-who-director-fights-prevent-pandemic-without-offending-china>

- This may sound like a carnival trick, but your age can be guessed correctly to within a few years with a swab from your skin. **Microbes** in the gut or mouth become less diverse and less abundant as we grow older. Researchers using machine learning techniques found that skin samples can **estimate your chronological age** to within 3.8 years, compared with 4.5 years from an oral sample and 11.5 years from a fecal sample.

<https://phys.org/news/2020-02-carnival-age-based-microbes.html>

- A recent study analyzing patient-level data from 33 clinical trials provided additional evidence linking **type 2**

**diabetes drug** rosiglitazone (**Avandia** brand name) to a variety of heart problems. Since 2014, Avandia has had a black box warning for causing or exacerbating congestive heart failure and is still on the market in the U.S. but is no longer widely used. GlaxoSmithKline has already paid out hundreds of millions of dollars to settle Avandia lawsuits.

<https://www.medpagetoday.com/cardiology/diabetes/84726>

- **Lockdown drills** at schools can be a traumatic experience for students, according to two teachers' groups, who are calling for an end (or at least a change) to "active shooter" training drills, which they say are promoted by for-profit groups selling the training to school districts. <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/11/804468827/2-big-teachers-unions-call-for-rethinking-student-involvement-in-lockdown-drills>

- Because of recent **polio outbreaks in Africa**, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has issued a travel alert to 15 countries, recommending that travelers make sure they have had all polio shots, including one-time polio booster for adults who were vaccinated as children.

<http://outbreaknewstoday.com/africa-cdc-issues-travel-notice-for-15-countries-due-to-polio-outbreaks-50410/>

- No person who was born **blind** has ever been diagnosed with **schizophrenia**. Scientists still do not know why, although the phenomenon has been noted for decades. More strangely, vision loss at other periods of life is associated with higher risks of schizophrenia and psychotic symptoms. A new theory of explanation has to do with how our mind is wired for prediction.

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/939qbz/people-born-blind-are-mysteriously-protected-from-schizophrenia](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/939qbz/people-born-blind-are-mysteriously-protected-from-schizophrenia)

- **Voltaren** Arthritis Pain (topical gel) has been approved by the U.S. FDA for a switch from **prescription-only** to **over-the-counter**. **Pataday eye drops** products (twice-daily and once-daily) for itchy eyes due to allergies have also been switched from Rx to OTC.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-three-drugs-nonprescription-use-through-rx-otc-switch-process>

- Scientists have identified a molecular switch that controls the immune machinery responsible for **chronic inflammation** in the body. The finding might lead to new ways to halt or even reverse many age-related conditions.

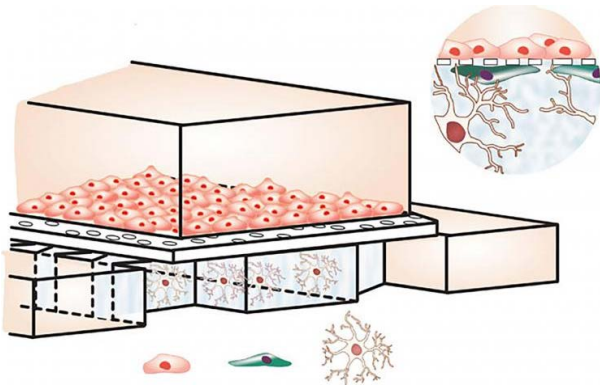
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/02/200206144837.htm>

- In yet another disappointment for the **Alzheimer's community**, a large academic clinical trial for two experimental drugs has failed. Lilly's **solanezumab** and Roche's **gantenerumab** were being tested in patients genetically predisposed to early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Both companies said they will continue to study the drugs for other Alzheimer's applications.

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/world/drug-fails-in-alzheimers-study/cid/1744103>

- Researchers at Georgia Tech created a 3-D **human blood-brain barrier on a chip**. The new chip provides a "healthy environment" for the barrier's central component, brain cells called astrocytes. Researchers are interested in the potential of the chip in testing experimental drugs for diseases like Alzheimer's and cancer.

<https://news.gatech.edu/2020/02/10/human-brains-meticulous-interface-bloodstream-now-precision-chip>



**Blood-Brain Barrier on a Chip Illustration** (link above)

*In this new blood-brain barrier on a chip, astrocytes (bottom) grow more naturally and function better. They interface with epithelial cells above them, and the better astrocyte health helps the rest of the culture function better, too.*

Credit: Georgia Tech / Kim lab / Yonsei University College of Medicine

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