

## Inside Tennessee's Medicine Cabinet

### How Much is Enough?

More is not always better for health, nor is it affordable. That's the message for Tennesseans when it comes to their high use of prescription medications.

BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, with oversight by the Tennessee Medical Association and the Tennessee Department of Health, has produced a report on high prescription drug use in Tennessee, its consequences and what is being done to curb the problem.

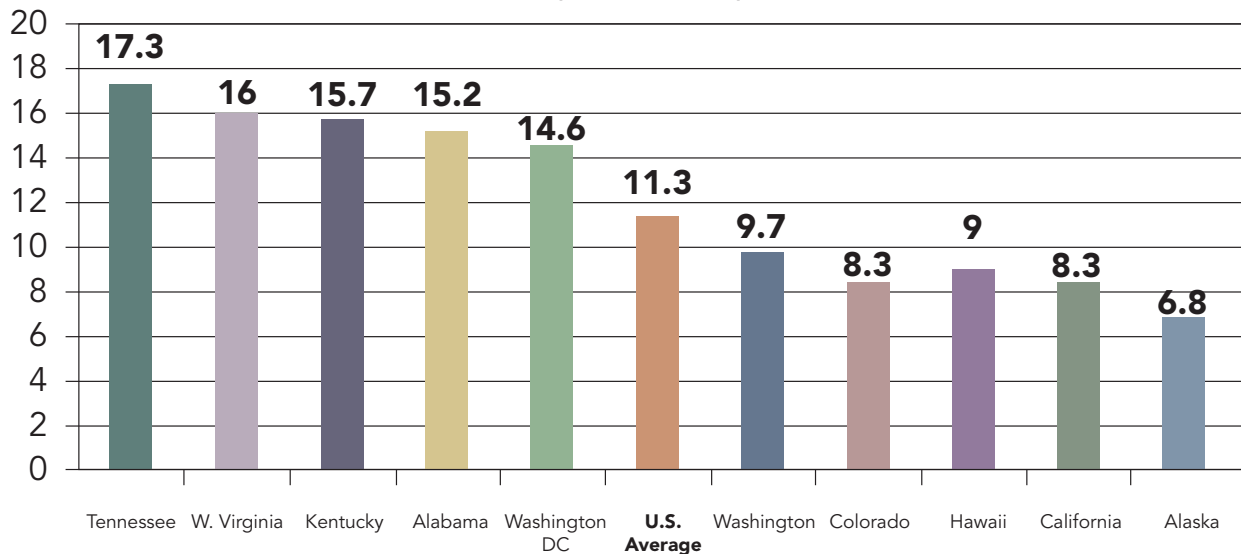
#### Prescription Drug Utilization Trends

Tennessee remains the highest use per capita state for prescription drugs at 17.3 prescriptions per capita, 2.5 times the use rate in Alaska and 1.5 times the national average.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to costs, Tennessee is second highest in per capita prescription drug spending at \$1,192.56 behind the District of Columbia. The national per capita prescription drug spend average is \$835.08, while spending is lowest in Hawaii at \$540.01 per capita.<sup>2</sup>

### We Are No. 1 (Again)

Prescriptions Per Capita 2005



Source: Novartis

(continued)

## Consequences and Adverse Effects

It is clear that Tennesseans are reliant upon prescription medications, but what do all these pill bottles and tablets add up to in terms of the state's health?

For all the money Tennessee spends on prescriptions, it should be healthier. Yet, the state ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in health status for its citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Medication errors, adverse drug events, antibiotic resistance, accidental poisoning and prescription abuse are just some of the consequences that befall Tennesseans.

- For Tennessee, with its 136 hospitals, the estimated cost of adverse drug events in hospitals tallies \$761 million annually.
- Tennessee's accidental poisoning rate stands 26 percent above the national average. Cost estimates for poisonings in 2003 tallied \$23.4 billion nationally and \$593 million for Tennessee.<sup>4</sup>
- Tennessee is ranked among the top 5 states in opioid use.<sup>5</sup>

## Prescription for Change

Changes are already underway in Tennessee to improve patient safety and reverse the prescription use trend. These changes include the use of electronic health records and e-prescribing; education campaigns focused on generic use and antibiotic resistance; and safety initiatives that include a study of physician prescribing habits and a statewide database of controlled substances.

As the various health care stakeholders collaboratively explore these mechanisms of change, Tennessee can, in fact, reverse the drug use trend, positively impact patient safety and ultimately transform the health care delivery system.

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1. Novartis, Pharmacy Benefits Report, Facts and Figures, 2006 Edition

2. Novartis, Pharmacy Benefits Report, Facts and Figures, 2006 Edition

3. United Health Foundation et al, "Your State's Health," <http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/ahr2006/findings.html/#findings> (accessed November 2006)

4. M Singleton et al., "Unintentional and Undetermined Poisoning Deaths ---11 States, 1990—2001," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 53, no. 11 (March 26, 2004):233-238.

5. LH Curtis et al., "Geographic Variation in the Prescription of Schedule II Opioid Analgesics among Outpatients in the United States," *Health Services Research* 41, no.3 (June 2006).



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