

## U.S. Doctors Continue Prescribing Unnecessary Drugs, Survey Says



The headline above comes from a December 5, 2016, United Press International story reporting on the results of a survey of doctors. The survey, conducted by the American College of Physicians, asked 5000 of their members to identify two drug treatments frequently used by internists that were unlikely to provide high value care to patients.

In spite of the fact that the doctors knew that the drug treatments they were prescribing were of no value or little value, 27% said that they administered antibiotics even though they knew the drugs would not be effective. The most common scenario described was for upper respiratory illnesses that are mostly caused by viruses.

Viruses are not affected by antibiotics making the use of those drugs totally worthless in those situations.

Other scenarios revealed by the survey showed that 9% of the aggressive treatments for terminally ill patients were of "questionable value." Additionally, 7% of medications for chronic pain were determined to be of little value according to the survey of doctors who gave out these drugs.

Dr. Amir Qaseem, vice president of clinical policy for the American College of Physicians (ACP) and chair of the ACP's High Value Care Task Force, commented, "There is a lot of waste in our health care system, and we need to acknowledge that."

The overuse of antibiotics has contributed to the increase of deadly superbug bacteria that are resistant to antibiotic treatments. The UPI article reports that according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the United States alone, more than 2 million people a year are infected with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. Even worse is that at least 23,000 of these people die each year as a direct result of these untreatable infections.

The CDC estimated that half of all antibiotics given to patients are not necessary. This translates into approximately 47 million unnecessary prescriptions for antibiotics in the U.S. each year.

Dr. Qaseem tried to explain why some doctors are adding to this situation by saying, "If a patient shows up in a physician's practice and they have an upper respiratory tract infection, it is most often viral and will resolve itself in a few days," Qaseem said. "You tell the patient to go home, rest, and it will be OK, but generally the expectation of a patient is that you will do something more than that."