



KRISTEN CZABAN | THE SHERIDAN PRESS

Latte pro

Regan McDougal makes a latte at The Hub on Smith's Grab N' Go Cafe Monday, Aug. 6, 2018.

Mining a new data set to pinpoint staffing issues in nursing facilities

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is not known for linguistic playfulness. Nonetheless, at least one person there must have been chuckling when it named its rich new data source for nursing home staffing levels the Payroll-Based Journal, or PBJ.

Like that classic sandwich, the PBJ data set is irresistible. CMS created it to fulfill a requirement of the Affordable Care Act to improve the accuracy of its five-star staffing ratings on Medicare's Nursing Home Compare website. The data set contains payroll records that nursing homes are required to submit to the government.

In April, Medicare began using them to rate staffing for more than 14,000 skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). The PBJ data gives a much better look at the how staffing relates to quality of care than the less precise — and too easy to inflate — staffing data Medicare had been using since 2008, which were based on two-week snapshots of staffing homes provided to inspectors. The data show staffing and occupancy on every day — an unprecedented degree of granularity that allows for new levels of inquiry. Low staffing is a root cause of many injuries in nursing homes. As I wrote in the article published in The New York Times based on the data: "When nursing homes are short of staff, nurses and aides scramble to deliver meals, ferry bed-bound residents to the bathroom and answer calls for pain medication. Essential medical tasks such as repositioning a patient to avert bedsores can be overlooked when workers are overburdened, sometimes leading to avoidable hospitalizations."

Analyzing the files took time. To start with, the files were too large to analyze in Excel — a challenge with more and more health care data sets. I previously had taken classes in SQL at the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, but this was the first project in which I had to use SQL. Fortunately, KHN has two great data journalists who steered, taught and backstopped me: data editor Elizabeth Lucas and data correspondent Sydney Lupkin.

There were a lot of decisions to make in the analysis. Should we count nursing administrators in assessing staffing levels? How should we define best-staffed and worst-staffed days? How do we handle the fact that the data in its raw form wasn't risk-adjusted — that is, that it didn't tell you how comparatively frail and sick each nursing home's residents were, making it dangerous to make comparisons. (You can read our decisions in our methodology, which accompanies the downloadable data.)

I guided myself with two intersecting principles: to reflect residents' lived experience as accurately as possible, and to be fair to the facilities. When in doubt, I erred on the side of caution.

I bounced approaches off not only Liz and Sydney, but two of the top health care researchers who have published studies on staffing: David Stevenson at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and David Grabowski at Harvard Medical School. Both are straight shooters and rigorous in their methods. It was also invaluable to talk early on in the project to the nursing home industry's trade group, the American Health Care Association, to solicit its views about the strengths and weaknesses of the data set.

I've been writing about nursing homes for a while, but until this story I didn't know the source value of SNF resident and family councils. These councils are authorized by CMS, and facilities must let them meet on their premises and invite to their meetings anyone they want, including journalists.

The leaders of the council at Beechtree Center for Rehabilitation & Nursing, the Ithaca, N.Y., home that provided the anecdotes for the story, were a reporter's dream: smart, dedicated and reasonable. They were able to see things from the facility administration's position, but also were firm advocates for good care. They had educated themselves about the facility and the rules and regulations.

Adam Chandler, whose mom was in Beechtree and whom I quoted in the story, had already been studying the PBJ data. The council's president, Stan Hugo, carried around a tan notebook where he jotted down incidents of staffing problems he came across. He also kept a daily log of how many employees he observed when visiting his wife and how many the administration said were on duty in the sign Medicare requires them to post publicly.

Our story ultimately focused on the wide fluctuations in nursing home staffing day to day, with staffing consistently plummeting on weekends. Caitlin Hillyard, one of KHN's web producers, created a terrific interactive graphic that reporters can use to see staffing patterns in nursing homes in your state. We encourage other reporters to download and use the data for their own stories. There's no cost — just please credit KHN and provide a link back to us.

JORDAN RAU writes for Kaiser Health News. KHN coverage of these topics is supported by John A. Hartford Foundation and The SCAN Foundation. KHN is a national health policy news service. It is an editorially independent program of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation which is not affiliated with Kaiser Permanente.

Insider Q&A: What's behind rising insulin prices?

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rising prices for insulin are getting scrutiny from diabetes patients, physicians and politicians.

More than 7 million Americans with diabetes need insulin to control their blood sugar and stave off dangerous complications. The average price of insulin tripled between 2002 and 2013, according to the American Medical Association. The group recently called on regulators to monitor competition among the three drugmakers who control the market.

Meanwhile, several congressional lawmakers are probing the multibillion dollar insulin market.

Drugmakers generally blame higher prices on health care middlemen who they say drive up prescription costs. Some drugmakers have pledged to limit their annual increases and also offer assistance to lower-income patients.

The Associated Press spoke with diabetes specialist Dr. Robert Lash, an executive with the Endocrine Society, about insulin prices. The questions and answers have been edited for clarity and length.

Q: How long has insulin been used to treat diabetes?

Purification of insulin was a major historical event and it happened about 100 years ago. Initially, it came

from animals. And then in the 1990s, recombinant DNA technology was available so we could make and purify human insulin in bacteria and that became the source of insulin.

Then people realized they could make insulins with different properties by making small genetic alterations — insulins that act more quickly or more slowly. Those are the insulins that are now the subject of the price increases we're seeing.

If you look at what's called regular insulin, you can get that at a pharmacy for \$25 to \$30 per vial. And if you look at the same insulin with one tiny amino acid change that insulin is \$300 a vial.

Q: What accounts for that price difference?

You have asked the question that everyone keeps asking. These insulins have been around for 20 years, they're made pretty much the exact same way in the exact same factories. What other manufactured product do you know that shows no economies of scale and no price drop in 20 years? TVs, phones, cars get cheaper — but insulin never does.

And the reason it doesn't is that it's a medicine that everybody needs and it has an incredibly complicated supply chain where every player is trying to maximize their own profit.

Q: How do these prices impact patients?

When patients don't have insurance and can't afford their insulin, bad things can happen. They may use less insulin than they should and their glucose isn't well controlled so they are more likely to have complications of diabetes.

Q: How are doctors responding?

There is a movement among some endocrinologists to go back to older forms of insulin because they are so much cheaper. They wouldn't be for everybody, but there are probably a lot of people who could use the older insulins. The trouble is that these newer insulins have been around so long that we have multiple generations of physicians who have never used the older insulins before.

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

- National Mutt Day is Tuesday. The Sheridan Dog and Cat Shelter will partner with The Hub to bring dogs to The Hub for all pooch lovers at 10 a.m. The group will be outside on the west lawn.
- Mondays during the month of August between the hours of 1:30-3:30 p.m., The Hub will host games of Plinko. The top three players that have the most points by the end of the month will win a \$20 gift card to the Grab-N-Go. Each participant gets three tries every Monday and must

be 21 years of age to participate. The event is located at the Grab-N-Go. Contact Jane Perkins or Jean Harm at (307) 672-2240.

- The Hub will offer a Rock Creek geology hike and camp event Saturday and Sunday. Meet in The Hub parking lot at 7:45 a.m. to depart at 8 a.m. The hike will include an optional overnight. Much of the Rock Creek watershed lies in a roadless area that borders Cloud Peak Wilderness. The South Creek Trail starts at the historic HF-Bar Ranch and follows the

creek to its headwaters. It is a strenuous hike and Leave No Trace outdoor ethics will be observed. The hike is 10 miles roundtrip.

There is no fee to participate, but contributions are welcome. A pre-hike planning meeting will take place Monday at 1 p.m. at The Hub on Smith. Sign-up at The Hub or by calling (307) 672-2240 or the Wyoming Wilderness Association at (307) 672-2751 by Monday. Want to spend the night? Coordinate with the Wyoming Wilderness Association.



FUN AND FOOD
BUILD YOUR OWN SALAD
Mondays - Fridays
Entrees and kiosk include sides, dessert and drink.

Salad Bar Available
Mondays - Fridays

No Salad Bar on Saturday or Sunday

ENTRÉE CHOICE* or SOUP/SALAD
Tue - Pasta Bolognese
Wed - Roasted Salmon w/Lemon
Thurs - Roasted Turkey w/Pan Drip Gravy
Fri - Beef Brisket
Sat - Turkey Club Sandwich
Sun - Chicken Alfredo
Mon - Philly Cheese Steak w/Sautéed Peppers & Onions

*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

Tue - "When I'm 64", or more	5:00 p.m.	Café
Wed - Pool Tournament	9:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m.	Billiard Room
Thurs - Sheridan Speaks Workshop	9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.	Community Room
Fri - Dog Days of Summer	1:00 p.m.- 3:30p.m.	Grab n Go
Sat - Texas Hold 'em	12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	Café
Mon. - Plinko (21 & over)	1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.	Grab n Go
Sun - Double Deck Pinochle	12:30 p.m.	Tech Nook

Lunch Service Hours: 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., 365 days a year at 211 Smith Street
Home Delivered Meals (307) 672-6079

Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968. 241 Smith Street: Mondays - Fridays.