

Mark Masselli: This is Conversations on Healthcare I'm Mark Masselli.

Margaret Flinter: And I'm Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: Well Margaret some new data out on the prevalence of diabetes in this country and as expected the numbers are on the rise.

Margaret Flinter: The rate of increase of diabetes in this country has gone from roughly 9.8% in 1994 to 14.3% in 2014.

Mark Masselli: Perhaps a more alarming is the number of Americans with pre-diabetes 38% of Americans have pre-diabetes which can often be reversed with proper diet and exercise interventions but still very much a disease related behavior.

Margaret Flinter: Well the study did have some promising information, the rate of increase actually has started to level off since 2008 that's too in part two greater awareness of risk factors for diabetes. And I think we have to note since the Affordable Care Act greater access to preventive care diagnosis and disease management.

Mark Masselli: Intervention and information are key, Margaret and our guest today is focusing on providing the American health consumer with materials that can inform and educate. Tara Montgomery is the Senior Director of Health Impact at Consumer Reports. They've develop resources for American consumers to protect themselves from medical harm. Find more affordable prescription drugs and become more informed health consumers.

Margaret Flinter: And of course Lori Robertson will be seeking ways to better inform us as well the managing editor of FactCheck.org will stop by she's always on the hunt for misstatements that are spoken about health policy in the public domain.

Mark Masselli: But no matter what the topic you can hear all of our shows by going to chcradio.com and as always if you have comments please email us at chcradio@chc1.com or find us on Facebook or Twitter we love hearing from you.

Margaret Flinter: We'll get to our interview with Tara Montgomery of consumer reports in just a moment.

Mark Masselli: But first here is our producer Marianne O'Hare with this week's headline news.

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Marianne O'Hare: I'm Marianne O'Hare with these Healthcare Headlines. A federal judge has pave the way for a house republican led lawsuit against the Obama Administration over the Affordable Care Act. The suit argue the president overreached

in his authority to increase spending on healthcare measures by billions of dollars. The judge rule the house could move ahead with its lawsuit posing another potentially significant challenge to the healthcare law.

And there are further threats in congress concerning health service funding with the GOP leadership considering shutting down government over Plant Parenthood funding. There are other health measures at risk once the budget runs out at the end of September, a number of programs aimed at preventing teen pregnancy and providing family planning services are on the block. Upwards of a billion dollars in funding for the national institutes of health also in jeopardy.

A third of American adults are obese or overweight and that obesity comes with many risks. Earlier on set of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and premature death, now comes another reason for concern. A recent study showed adults who are overweight at age 50 had a higher chance of succumbing to Alzheimer's disease at an earlier age, this is the first study showing a link between obesity and early on set. Another reason to get the upper hand in the battle of the Bulge.

And Monsanto has seen a setback in France the land of the discerning gastronome a judge in France has rule that a farmer expose to the Monsanto (inaudible 3:26) severed toxic and neurological damage is a result. (inaudible 3:30) has been outlawed in France and a number of other countries including Canada since 2007. This is the first lawsuit supporting actual physical harm from exposure, Monsanto vowing to take the suite to France's highest court. I'm Marianne O'Hare with these Healthcare Headlines.

(Music)

Mark Masselli: We're speaking today with Tara Montgomery Senior Director of Health Impact at Consumer Reports where she currently oversees the development in information and tools design to help the public make more informed choices about healthcare. Ms. Montgomery served in numerous roles at consumer reports where she oversaw the launch of several consumer focused health initiatives. Ms. Montgomery has served in senior editorial roles in publishing and help launch (inaudible 4:20) the pioneering online learning network based at Columbia University. Ms. Montgomery earned her degree Kings College of London, Tara welcome to Conversations on Healthcare.

Tara Montgomery: Thank you Mark it's my pleasure to be here.

Mark Masselli: That's great, well for most of our listeners I think they may well be aware consumer reports is the world's largest independent product testing and consumer advocacy organization dedicated to helping consumers make more informed choices about the products they consume. And while consumer reports has been involved in

healthcare space for sometime there certainly been a see-change for consumers to have a say in both the quality of care and the cost of healthcare they consume in. I'm wondering if you could give our listeners some background on the genesis of consumer report health division and how consumer reports role is evolving in this new era of consumer driven healthcare.

Tara Montgomery: Yes well, actually Consumer Reports was founded in 1936 and ever since our first issue of the magazine we've covered healthcare. So we rated Alka Seltzer

Mark Masselli: Isn't that great?

Tara Montgomery: Claims that -- it's claims vanish like the gas bubbles in the air.

Margaret Flinter: Pop-pop, fist-first oh what a relief it is we still remember that.

Tara Montgomery: That's right and we've been active in health for decade so we actually spoke out in favor of universal healthcare in our magazine back in 1939. And kept working on health issues for decades but really wrapped up ten years ago when we saw the kind of movement of health information coming online for consumers and a dialogue about reform. And we say health was becoming really the number one consumer issue of that decade and we decided to step up and advocate for consumers. One of course was to join the health reform campaign and we supported the ACA and make sure it had provisions that protected consumers. Along with that we worked hard on transparency especially as technology meant that data could be more available and we began to fight for our advocacy division to see more data about clinical trials results about the safety of hospitals, about infection rates and other things. We launched the health rating center where we began to do comparisons of health services and products based on science. And then following healthcare reform we've been trying to help consumers make sense of their role as, quote, consumers of healthcare to become a more empowered health consumer which was a difficult thing to do than healthcare we knew that if we wanted to reach people who really needed health support that we needed to cast our net more widely and work with everyone from migrant farm worker groups to unions.

Margaret Flinter: Well Tara certainly there's really a daunting set of choices in the healthcare purchases being made by millions of Americans. Some 16 million new consumers have entered the insurance market place purchasing insurance online for the first time and many of these newly insured Americans now have to navigate the health system in a new way. So maybe talk to us a little bit beyond the coverage aspect how is your organization working to inform the consumer then how are you perhaps helping the healthcare system respond to the needs of these new consumers as well?

Tara Montgomery: Well we do want a new exchanges and new plans to succeed. And we collaborate with some of them including in California to make sure that they're very usable as systems and that choice is really available. And we're pressing to make sure that plans in those exchanges are really high value plans for consumers. Beyond that we really keep an eye on the rates because cost is an issue and -- and we watch the quality of networks because for any given health plan really the quality of their network leads to other health decisions and other expenses for consumers. And then when they're actually insured and covered we are interested in making sure that consumers understand what a high value decision looks like and then that they're using their plan benefits wisely and they're out of pocket cost wisely. And insuring that they get the essential care that they need.

Mark Masselli: As you've mention there's a see-change going on in the health insurance landscape with the rise of high deductible health plans and it was sort of suggested it was going to empower health consumers to be more aware of their cost. And yet on the other hand we're seeing where consumers are putting off a vital health care due to the increase in pocket cost. I'm wondering if you could describe some of the more challenging aspects of this trend and what's the greatest concern you have and the fox at Consumer Reports?

Tara Montgomery: At Consumer Reports we have seen that data that consumers have been avoiding certain healthcare due to the cost and we've done our own research that validates that. And we also hear from consumer simply that they're mad about the outrageous cost of their healthcare. And we're very concerned about consumer debt in general, student debt and medical debt. I want to see that reduced. So what we're working on to address a portion of that is fighting for price transparency which has been a real barrier to consumers being able to make assessments about the kind of care they can afford. And then we're working on a campaign around surprise medical bills which is often an issue where there is a lack of transparency or at least a lack of communication. And we're enlisting consumers to fight that fight with us and see (inaudible 9:47) changes to prevent the surprise medical bills in different states.

And then on a more practical levels the consumer we have two programs. One is called Choosing Wisely and the other is called Best Buy Drugs which both really show people how to spend their dollars wisely and avoid unnecessary expenses because a lot of their time is out of pocket cost that they encounter may not have been for necessary care they may have been for certain kinds of screenings for examples that could have been avoided. Thirdly encouraging consumers to shop around in the reality of this market place and not be afraid to ask questions about cost so we really push consumers to ask those difficult questions about cost.

And we also worry about the fact that the burden of cost is shifting to consumers and that there's this expectation that consumers can take on this so called consumers behavior very quickly. When really we're part of a long term culture shift and there's a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of providers and payers to support consumers in navigating this and not leave consumers to their own devices just because they're in the market place.

Margaret Flinter: Well Tara I'd like to go a little deeper into one project that you mention and that was the Choosing Wisely campaign. I understand you actually led the team a consumer reports health that partnered with the ABIM Foundation to launch that campaign and we always like to give a shout out to Dr. Steve Smith who is one our medical staff in our organization in Connecticut and who is one of the leading proponents in that campaign. Maybe you could talk to us a little bit more about your organization's role in that campaign the kind of resources you developed for it, we'd also like to hear about your organization's participation in the Preventing over Diagnosis conference at the National Institute of Health which focused on this issue.

Tara Montgomery: Well back in 2012 we built a relationship with the ABIM Foundation and agreed that it was important to encourage conversations between healthcare providers and patients about the evidence the safety, the cost and value information for the test treatments and procedures that they're considering. And we love the idea that patients and healthcare providers can be looking at the same evidence together as they make decisions together about what's really necessary.

So we actually partner with many specialty medical society to translate into consumer language. The list items that were developed for Choosing Wisely, so Steve Smith who you mentioned is a real pioneer in developing this idea of list of topics that should be avoided or questioned. And we've taken list from maybe a 100 medical society and create a consumer resources that explain why that test treatments or procedure may not be necessary and how much these things might cost.

So we have created these resources as brochures as web pages, as videos to reach different kinds of consumers at different stages in their health decision making. First to become aware of the issue of waste and other use. And then ultimately to activate consumers to ask those difficult questions about whether something's really needed. One of the best examples of how that's beginning to be used is the way that we integrate consumer information into other decision tools at the point of decision making and that include some of the transparency tools like cost like health and change health and healthcare blue book. And then electronic medical record systems which are increasingly including Choosing Wisely resources for providers to print out, to have a discussion with consumers.

So we are collaborating with ABIM and the societies on that. And with a huge partnership network so that we now reach a 100 million consumers a year with content and messages around Choosing Wisely. And antibiotics which you mentioned is now a real focus area for Choosing Wisely and we have a grant through Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to work with seven regional groups to try and reduce the use of antibiotics in upper respiratory and vile infections by 20% of the three years. And then as for preventing of a diagnosis which is a movement that's been evolving in parallel with Choosing Wisely. We do look at the over diagnosis issues and excited by the synergy between the preventing of diagnosis movement which really leads to an over treatment culture and it's a conversations about wasting of use. And Consumer Reports likes to have allies working in the same direction maybe with different kinds of tactics and different kinds of relationships but always in dialogue with one another to see how together we can affect the market place overtime.

Mark Masselli: We're speaking today with Tara Montgomery Senior Director of Health Impact at Consumer Reports where she oversees the development and production of information tools design to help the public make more informed choices about healthcare. You know, it's fascinating to hear about the sort of complexity and the Consumer Report has and with that comes a greater degree of transparency in the healthcare professions. We recently had Dr. Christen (inaudible 15:07) of the National Quality Forum talking about the need for better outcome measurement data. Medical mistakes this number is up in an astronomical level 100,000 deaths per year. Tell our listeners about the work you're doing on patient safety and you've touched on some of that already how you're providing health consumers with this reliable outcome data.

Tara Montgomery: Consumer Reports is a nonprofit advocacy organization which some people don't realize. And under the offices of that we have an advocacy effort called the Safe Patient Project where a network of advocates really fight around transparency, legislation, accountability and public awareness and have really led fights against hospital acquired infections with many successes around data disclouser across the state. And really raise the alarm around medical errors, so we have a network that really fights for the data which we can then use in ratings for consumers. And we do believe that by making that data available to consumers they can learn to make comparisons and make choices in healthcare that will result in them being safer.

But ultimately yes we do believe that data helps consumers make choices and it also helps providers understand how they can improve and that's equally important to us is that hospitals and physicians and drug manufacturers see publicly how we're talking about safety issues. So we care very much about outcomes data, we worry that there isn't enough good data out there yet for us to do the best job we can to provide tools and resources to consumers. So we are very encouraged by efforts to do more patient

center the outcomes research because we do know that it's in a long term interest of the healthcare system.

And we sit on many committees around quality and safety of the institute of medicine and in fact **Christ Castle [PH]** organization that you mention the National Quality Forum and ensure that there is improvement going on in the system separate from whether consumers are beginning to shift our own behavior.

Margaret Flinter: Well Tara one area where consumer seem to be genuinely mystified and that's with prescription drugs. According to a recent consumer report survey 75% of Americans say they've had to change their spending habits to accommodate their budgets for higher price prescription drugs and that's led to people simply not buying their prescriptions or even avoiding visits with their providers because of it. Maybe you could talk with us about consumer reports best buy drugs program and the resources you've developed for consumers in that area, how does it work for them?

Tara Montgomery: It's unique and that it's unbiased and we have found that so many (inaudible 17:54) drug information for consumer are funded by Pharma or there's a lot of drug advertising in our culture that leads people to expect or ask for brand name or high cost drugs. And so we're one of the few organizations that is able to tell the truth based on the systematic reviews of the evidence the safety and effectiveness how there are differences between different kinds of drugs.

Often we also conclude that people may not need to start with the drug and that's something that again culturally maybe is not recognized very well by consumers that there are lifestyle changes that may mean that you don't need to start a drug. And in every case we talk about cost and we've just created a new resource called best drugs for less and that includes tips for consumers on ways to save on their drug which is another tactic that is not commonly understood is how consumers can often even not use their insurance and save money, how they can negotiate for their drug prices. So we are happy to keep that going in service of consumers who need to find cheaper drugs, there's work to do to speak up against the fast increase in drug prices and certainly the cost of new drugs which are just unfair for consumers. So the best buy drugs program focuses more on commonly used drugs and then advocacy work we're starting to look at more specialty drugs.

Mark Masselli: We've been speaking today with Tara Montgomery Senior Director of Health Impact at Consumer Reports you can learn more about their work by going to consumerreports.org or follow her on Twitter @Tara CR Health. Tara thank you so much for joining us on Conversations on Healthcare.

Tara Montgomery: Thank you so much.

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Mark Masselli: At Conversations on Healthcare we want our audience to be truly in the know when it comes to the facts about healthcare reform and policy. Lori Robertson is an award-winning journalist and managing editor of FactCheck.org a nonpartisan, nonprofit consumer advocate for voters that aim to reduce the level of deception in US politics, Lori what have you got for us this week?

Lori Robertson: Carly Fiorina has said that some vaccine preventable diseases are, quote, not communicable and not contagious. And that some immunizations are not necessary for children but every immunization recommend by the centers for disease control and prevention covers a highly communicable disease. The CDCs recommended schedule for children contains 14 vaccines and they all include coverage against highly communicable diseases. Fiorina the former Hewlett-Packard CEO who is running for the republican presidential nomination has also suggested on multiple occasions that the vaccine for HPV shouldn't be mandatory for school age children. The CDC currently recommends that all boys and girls age 11 or 12 years old should receive it. The HPV virus is highly communicable through many forms of sexual contact and the vaccine has been shown to prevent its transmission protecting against strands of the virus that are known to cause cervical cancer.

Fiorina has told a story about her daughter being bullied into letting her own daughter receive the HPV vaccine. In an interview with (inaudible 21:17) Fiorina said there was a difference between in measles vaccine and a vaccination, quote, when a girl is 10 or 11 or 12 for cervical cancer just in case she's actually active at 11. But the vaccine is recommended then because that is before most people become sexually active and before they're at risk. According to the CDC about 14 million Americans become infected with HPV every year. And that's my fact check for this week I'm Lori Robertson Managing Editor of FaceCheck.org.

Margaret Flinter: FactCheck.org is committed to factual accuracy from the country's major political players and is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. If you have a fact, that you would like checked, email us at www.chcradio.com. We will have FactCheck.org's Lori Robertson check it out for you here on Conversations on Healthcare.

Mark Masselli: Each week Conversations highlights a bright idea about how to make wellness a part of our communities and to everyday lives. For all the people in the world without limbs, acquiring prosthetics can be costly and out of reach. It's especially challenging to make prosthetics for children since they are in constant state of growth. Rochester Institute of Technology Scientist Dr. Jon Schull stumbled upon a clever and

affordable solution provided online open source templates to anyone, anywhere in the world who has access to a 3D printer and provide prosthetic hands from next to nothing.

Dr. Jon Schull: I've made this Google map (inaudible 22:55) if you have a 3D printer and you'd like to help put yourself on this map and if you know someone who needs a hand put yourself on this map.

Mark Masselli: So he founded that enable network which has mash thousands of volunteer makers in upwards of 40 countries around the world providing cheap but functional prosthetics for children in need.

Dr. Jon Schull: I think we're currently pushing 5800 identified members in our Google plus community. And we have followings in the thousands more, we know that we've delivered about 800 hands devices and we suspect that a comparable number have been downloaded by people we can't track because we split all of our design on the internet.

Mark Masselli: The movement has grown so rapidly the simple limb designs have become more sophisticated as recipients of the prosthetic devices provide feedback for designers to make more efficient devices.

Dr. Jon Schull: We're still working on a plausible thumbs, we're still working on individual finger movements these things grip or un grip that's all they do. So they're much less functional than our biological hands and they are also less functional than a (inaudible 24:02) electric hand. But for kids it's huge because those expensive devices are typically out of reach for children who would outgrow them and, you know, our hands don't even pretend to look like regular hands they look like super hero, Iron Man hand and for that there are reason. They are very popular with kids.

Mark Masselli: Enable a global collaborative network of open source designs linking to makers with 3D printers to provide low cost prosthetic limbs to children and adults around the world who might otherwise not be able to afford them, now that's a bright idea.

(Music)

Margaret Flinter: This is Conversations on Healthcare, I'm Margaret Flinter.

Mark Masselli: And I'm Mark Masselli, peace and health.

Conversations on Healthcare, broadcast from the campus of WESU at Wesleyan University, streaming live at www.wesufm.org and brought to you by the Community Health Center.