

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

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HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE  
COALITION

**From the Editor:** As the US enters pandemic year four, there's lots of news to report on the pharmaceutical front and concerns about millennial's health. Click on the headline to read the full article.



[Pandemic 3 years later: Has the Covid-19 virus won?](#), by Carla K. Johnson, Associated Press, 3/10/23

**TMR Topline** – With the

Covid-19 pandemic entering its fourth year, the virus still spreading, and the global death toll nearing seven million, University of Wisconsin-Madison virus researcher Thomas Friedrich said, “*New variants emerging anywhere threaten us everywhere.*” Most Americans have resumed normal activities thanks to the immunity built from infections and vaccines. However, the virus is still here with the ever-present threat of a more dangerous variant spreading everywhere. The World Health Organization is [not yet ready](#) to declare the emergency ended. The pandemic still kills 900-1,000 people daily worldwide. It's become harder to keep tabs on the pandemic as Johns Hopkins University has shut down [its trusted tracker](#). The virus still spreads easily from person to person, killing some victims while most bounce back without much harm.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of Scripps Research Translational Institute said, “*We've become numb to the daily death toll, but we should view it as too high.*” The virus could mutate to become more transmissible, more able to evade the immune system or more deadly. He is concerned that the erosion of trust in public health agencies has caused an exodus of public health workers who would be needed should the virus mutate to a more

infectious and deadly variation. “*The pandemic really catalyzed some amazing science,*” said Friedrich, noting the rapidity with which the virus' genetic code was unlocked and safe, effective vaccines were developed.



[Senators press Moderna CEO on Covid-19 vaccine price hike](#), by Tom Murphy, Associated Press, 3/22/23

**TMR Topline** – Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel defended a plan to more than quadruple the company's Covid-19 vaccine

price to about \$130/dose in testimony to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Stating that the company must now assume more costs and risk, he said, “*The volume we had during the pandemic gave us economies of scale we won't have anymore.*” Moderna will have to make more doses than it anticipates using to ensure enough is available, and switch from 10 dose vials to single dose vials. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., noted that Moderna has made more than \$20 billion in profits over the past two years, and the federal government contributed billions of dollars toward the vaccine's development. While the company will have a patient assistance program to cover shots for people without coverage or who are underinsured, Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., a doctor, noted that these programs can involve complex paperwork and be difficult to use.



[3 major insulin makers have now slashed the price of the life-saving drug. Here's why.](#), by Ken Alltucker, USA Today, 3/16/23

**TMR Topline** – Sanofi announced Thursday it would slash the price of its most-prescribed insulin, Lantus, joining [Novo Nordisk](#) and [Eli Lilly's plans to slash U.S. prices](#) by up to 75% and 70%, respectively. Sanofi said it will cut the price of Lantus by 78% and short-acting Apidra by 70% as of Jan. 1, 2024. A [2020 survey](#) by T1International found that 1 in 4 people with Type 1 diabetes rationed insulin because of cost. It is pushing for a federal policy that would cap the cost of insulin.



**Why Does Insulin Cost So Much? Big Pharma Isn't the Only Player Driving Prices**, by Arthur Allen, Kaiser Health News, 3/9/23

**TMR Topline** – List prices for the century-old drug, which 8.4 million Americans depend on for survival, quintupled over two decades to more than \$300 for a single vial. Drugmakers are not the only villain in the insulin price scandal. Lilly, Sanofi, and Novo Nordisk posted stagnant or declining revenue from their versions of the drug in recent years despite the steadily climbing list prices they charged and advised investors that they don't see insulin sales as a high-profit area anymore. Pharmacy benefit managers owned by CVS Health and insurance giants UnitedHealthcare and Cigna have aggressively played the insulin makers off one another in a way that mainly fattened their own accounts, as was revealed in a scathing 2021 Senate Finance Committee report. The three insulin makers have steadily increased the rebates and fees paid to the PBMs to better their placement on insurance formularies.

It costs roughly \$2 to \$4 to produce a vial of analog insulin, the type used by most patients. But patients who are uninsured, underinsured, or pay high deductibles can end up with whopping insulin bills, because their copayments are tied to the drug's list price. According to a KFF study Medicare beneficiaries paid \$1 billion out-of-pocket for their insulin in 2020, more than four times what they paid in 2007.

**TMR's Take:** Shed no tears for Big Pharma – the three companies reported total 2022 profits of \$22.9 billion on revenues of \$80.2 billion – a 28.5% profit margin!



**Acorn's downfall amplifies shortage of asthma med albuterol, FDA warns**, by Fraiser

Kansteiner, Fierce Pharma, 3/9/23

**TMR Topline** – Acorn Pharma filed for bankruptcy last month and mothballed its US operations, leaving South Carolina's Nephron Pharmaceuticals as the drug's sole domestic producer. Liquid albuterol—which is inhaled via nebulizer to increase air flow to the lungs—has been running scarce since autumn, according to the FDA. The FDA stressed that the shortage is limited to a *“very specific dosage form of the medication”* that's typically used in hospitals.



**Drug to prevent pre-term birth pulled from market, years after it was shown ineffective**, by Melody Peterson, Los

Angeles Times, 3/8/23

**TMR Topline** – Covis Pharma has finally agreed to voluntarily remove Makena from the market after a 2019 study showed it did not extend pregnancies. The Times' February 2022 investigation detailed how Covis and prior owners of the rights to Makena profited by taking a cheap, decades-old medicine with questionable effectiveness and safety and securing FDA authorization for its use. The agency approved Makena 12 years ago despite limited evidence that it worked and objections from an agency scientist. In 2020, the FDA had asked Covis, a Luxembourg company owned by private equity firm Apollo Global Management, to pull the drug after the study's negative results were announced, but the company refused. At the October 2022 hearing, an FDA committee of experts voted 14 to 1 that sales of the drug should end because of the lack of scientific proof that it reduced the risk of preterm births. A synthetic hormone, Makena has a plethora of documented side effects, including depression and hypertension.

**TMR's Take:** Accelerated approval, delayed removal, not a great track record for the underfunded FDA.



**Millennials are racking up more chronic health conditions compared to other generations: study**, by Angelica Stabile, Fox News, 3/9/23

**TMR Topline** – A study conducted by United Healthcare and the Health Action Council found that millennials are seeking more professional help for health issues than ever. Based on a review of claims data for 126,000 individuals aged 27-42, it found that millennials with common chronic medical conditions and their children are *“high utilizers”* of the health care system compared to Generation X. This includes 106% more hospital admissions for millennials with diabetes and 55% more emergency room (ER) and urgent care (UC) visits for hypertension. Millennials with back disorders have visited the ER and UC 22% more than Gen X, with 46% higher hospital admissions. There have been 36% higher ER and UC visits for millennials with osteoarthritis.