

Using Prescriber Checkup: A Quick Guide

Until recently, there was no way for members of the public to assess whether doctors prescribe medications responsibly or to compare their drug choices with those of their peers. ProPublica obtained this data for Medicare’s drug program, which serves 36 million people and pays for one of every four prescriptions written nationwide, and used it to investigate prescribing patterns for [a series of stories](#). With our [Prescriber Checkup](#) news application, we’ve made it easy to search for doctors and other health providers who are active in the drug program, called Part D. You can find out how many prescriptions each wrote and which drugs were prescribed. You can compare your doctor to others in his or her specialty and state. And you can check out the drugs you are taking or any that your doctor recommends.

Using Prescriber Checkup, you can:

- 1) [Search for doctors or other health providers by name and see the drugs they have prescribed](#)
- 2) [Compare doctors in a city or zip code](#)
- 3) [Compare doctors in a medical specialty or a state](#)
- 4) [View the top prescribers of a particular drug](#)
- 5) [Compare name-brand prescribing rates in a state](#)
- 6) [Check to see whether a doctor has a financial relationship with a company that makes drugs he or she prescribes.](#)

Click on each of the links above to be taken to that section of the document.

This tipsheet will walk you through each of these scenarios. **If you are a consumer, we also [have a guide to why this information may be valuable to you in assessing your doctors and the medications they prescribe.](#)**

First, go to www.propublica.org/checkup.

Prescriber Checkup

The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

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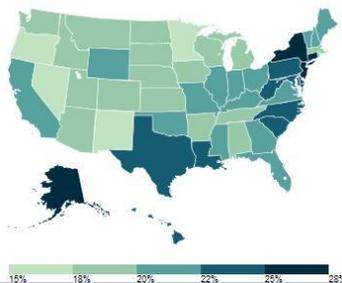
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By Jeff Larson, Jennifer LaFleur, Charles Ornstein, Tracy Weber and Lena Groeger, ProPublica, Updated Nov. 18, 2013

Medicare’s popular prescription-drug program serves 36 million people and pays for one of every four prescriptions written nationwide. Use this tool to find and compare doctors and other providers in Part D in 2011. | [Related story](#) »

How States Compare

Percent claims for name-brand drugs from primary care physicians, 2011. See state by state data »



Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

All States

Prescriptions by State

State	Top 500 Drug Cost
National	\$71.8B
Alabama	\$1.23B
Alaska	\$83.4M

Top Drugs

Drug Name	Total Claims	Total Cost
SIMVASTATIN	40.9M	\$594M
LISINAPRIL	32.7M	\$322M
HYDROCODONE	31.4M	\$430M

Searching for a doctor by name

For now, enter in the name “Mark Smith” in the search box on the main page. A similar search box appears on every page in the app. You’ll see something like this:

Prescriber Checkup
The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

[Prescriber Checkup](#) » Search for Mark Smith

7,223 Results for “Mark Smith”

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: [Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216](#)

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What's Not Here: To be included, a provider had to write 50 or more prescriptions for at least one drug in Medicare Part D in 2010. Medications provided at an office visit or hospital aren't included because they are covered by other parts of Medicare. Prescriptions also are not included for Medicare enrollees covered through employers, the Veterans Health Administration or some retiree health plans.

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Prescriber	Claims Filled	Total Cost	Medicare Part D Patients	Claims for Brand Name Drugs
MARK SMITH MD Family Medicine San Antonio Texas 78240	3,195	\$164K	196	17%
MARK SMITH M.D. Cardiovascular Disease Traverse City Michigan 49684	1,869	\$150K	366	21%

The news app will first display results that exactly match your search and will then list results that partially match. Mark Smith is a common name. Once you find the one you want, click on the name (in blue).

For purposes of this analysis, I chose Dr. Mark Smith of Ventura, Calif. This is what his prescriber page looks like:

Prescriber Checkup » California » Ventura

MARK SMITH M.D.

3291 LOMA VISTA RD
Ventura | California | 93003
(805) 652-6556
[Incorrect Info?](#)
[Search this name in Dollars for Docs »](#)

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

 All States SEARCH

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

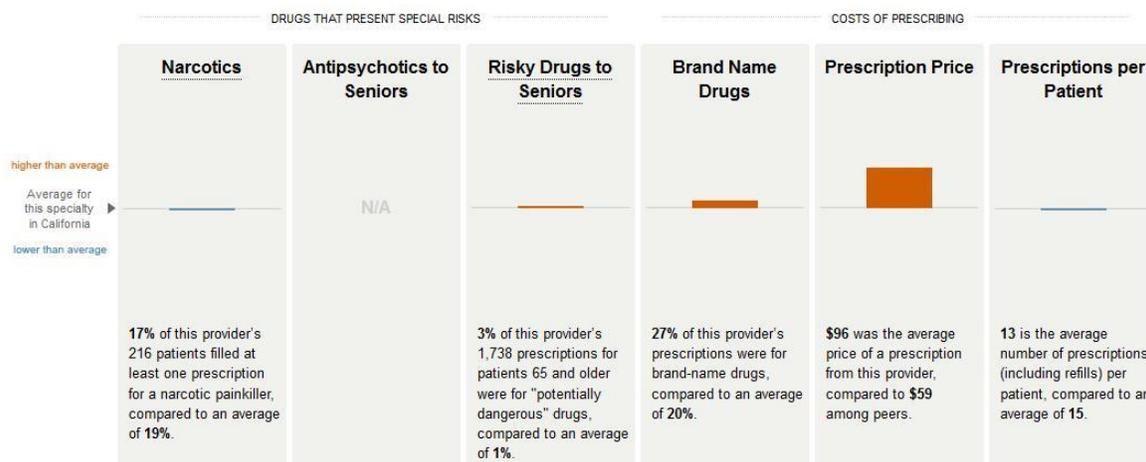
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At A Glance: This Prescriber in 2011

Family Medicine Self-Reported Primary Specialty See Other Prescribers With This Specialty in This State »	2,879 Medicare Part D Prescriptions Filled, Including Refills Rank: 3532 out of 6823	\$275K Total Retail Price of All Prescriptions Rank: 1823 out of 6823	216 Patients Receiving at Least One Drug in Part D	56% Patients 65 Years and Older	85% Subsidized Claims for Low-Income Patients
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How Does This Prescriber Compare to Peers?

In the same specialty and state. [Caveats »](#)

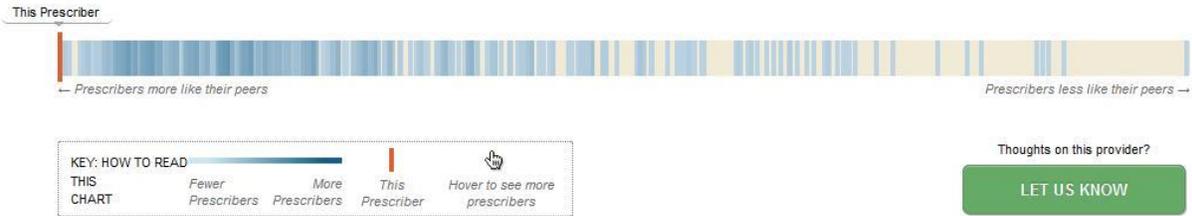


At the top, you will see his contact information. Then you'll see some top-line statistics, including the number of Medicare Part D patients for whom he wrote prescriptions in 2011, the number of prescriptions they filled, the retail cost of those prescriptions, as well as some demographic data. Below that you will see six key measures we selected on how the provider compares to peers in prescribing drugs that present special risks, as well as the cost of his prescribing. Smith, it appears, is not among the more active prescribers in Part D. (This data does not include what he prescribes to patients with private insurance or in California's Medicaid program, known as Medi-Cal.)

Scroll down a bit more on this same page and you'll see this:

Another View

This chart shows a different comparison of all providers in this specialty based on their mix of drugs and volume. Providers are grouped by similarity; those least like their peers are farthest to the right. Hover over the bars to see names of other prescribers. The comparison includes the 500 prescribers in this specialty and state with the most Part D claims.



This chart compares Smith to others in his specialty (family medicine) and state (California) based on his mix of drugs and his volume. The further left the orange bar is, the more the doctor is like his peers. In this case, Smith's choice of drugs and his volume is very similar to other specialists in his state.

If you scroll down further still on the same page, you will see a list of the drugs Smith prescribed in 2011. (We only display drugs the doctor prescribed at least 50 times, including refills).

This Prescriber's Drugs

The table below list this provider's drugs, the number of prescriptions and how many went to seniors. Drugs are ranked by volume and compared with the rank for all providers in the same specialty and state.

Search for a Drug

5 questions to ask about a new drug »
 via Consumer Health Choices

Compare different prescription drugs »
 via Consumer Reports

Click to Filter by Category



An antipsychotic drug.
[More »](#)



A risky drug for seniors.
[More »](#)



A narcotic drug.
[More »](#)



This provider is among the top 10 prescribers of this drug in the country.



This provider's prescriptions for this drug were for more days than those of peers.
[More »](#)



This provider's prescriptions for this drug were for fewer days than those of peers.
[More »](#)

THIS DRUG'S RANK

Drug Name	Total Prescriptions Filled Including Refills	Prescriptions to 65+	Category	For this Prescriber	For All Prescribers in This Specialty in California
LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM Levothyroxine, a thyroid ho... +	138	66		1	7
HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN Used to relieve moderate to... +	127	63		2	3
LIPITOR Lowers high cholesterol and... +	114	73		3	14
SIMVASTATIN Treats high cholesterol and... +	110	50		4	1

In this table, you will see the drug’s name, a brief description (if it is among the 500 most-prescribed drugs in the program), the number of prescriptions filled, and the number of those that went to patients over age 65 (some drugs pose special risks for the elderly). We also show how the drug ranks for this provider and how it ranks for all providers in the specialty and state. Finally, you can filter the drug list for certain categories: narcotics, antipsychotics and drugs labeled as potentially inappropriate for seniors by the American Geriatrics Society. You can also see if a doctor’s prescriptions for a drug ranked him or her among the top 10 prescribers of that drug nationally.

Searching by city or zip code

Let’s say you are interested in all providers in a geographic area. There’s a search box on every page that looks like this:

Enter in 11216, which is a zip code for one area of Brooklyn. The app will show you any provider who lists a practice location in that zip code. (Prescribing varies dramatically even in adjacent zip codes. See this map we created: <http://www.propublica.org/article/medicare-wastes-billions-on-name-brand-drugs#maps>).

You’ll see this zip code has 22 providers. You can explore them and sort them by number of claims, number of patients, cost and percentage of name-brand drugs.

Prescriber Checkup » Search for 11216

22 Results for “11216”

Go Straight To: [11216, N.Y. »](#)

What’s Not Here: To be included, a provider had to write 50 or more prescriptions for at least one drug in Medicare Part D in 2010. Medications provided at an office visit or hospital aren’t included because they are covered by other parts of Medicare. Prescriptions also are not included for Medicare enrollees covered through employers, the Veterans Health Administration or some retiree health plans.

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Prescriber	Claims Filled	Total Cost	Medicare Part D Patients	Claims for Brand Name Drugs
FERNAND THEOGENE M.D. Family Medicine Brooklyn New York 11216	4,844	\$354K	232	36%
MARK JACKSON MD Internal Medicine Brooklyn New York 11216	2,355	\$165K	191	36%
LINDA BASTIEN MD Family Medicine Brooklyn New York	1,821	\$128K	176	33%

Searching by specialty and state

Go back to app home page (www.propublica.org/checkup). You will see a list of states:

Prescriptions by State

State	Top 500 Drug Cost
National	\$71.8B
Alabama	\$1.23B
Alaska	\$83.4M
Arizona	\$1.13B
Arkansas	\$775M
California	\$7.46B
Colorado	\$756M
Connecticut	\$894M
Delaware	\$217M
District of Columbia	\$115M
Florida	\$5.03B
Georgia	\$2.04B
Hawaii	\$316M

Click on a state -- California, for example -- and you will see a page that looks like this:

Prescriber Checkup » California

California

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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Doctors With Most Claims

HEW QUON M.D.	78,160 claims
SANG BAIK	66,228 claims
TSOVINAR TEKKELIAN M.D.	55,017 claims
ARMINE NAZARYAN M.D.	53,519 claims
MANIKANDA RAJA M.D.	53,376 claims

Top Drugs

Rank	Cost Rank	Drug	Drug Cost	Claims
1	22	SIMVASTATIN Treats high cholesterol and... +	\$71,991,462	4,314,444
2	31	HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN Used to relieve moderate to... +	\$53,280,716	3,596,855
3	47	LISINAPRIL Treats high blood pressure ... +	\$38,885,321	3,128,111
4	38	AMLODIPINE BESYLATE Amlodipine is used alone or... +	\$45,496,340	3,040,272
5	26	OMEPRAZOLE Treats heartburn, stomach u... +	\$65,203,281	2,633,055
6	87	LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM Levothyroxine, a thyroid ho... +	\$23,483,524	2,307,680
7	76	METFORMIN HCL Metformin is used alone or ... +	\$27,361,475	2,228,500

Top Specialties

Providers are grouped by the primary specialty they listed when applying for a national health ID number. This doesn't necessarily mean the person has special training or certification. Specialty is self-reported by providers and may have changed or been entered incorrectly. Patients and claims shown are for Medicare only.

Self reported specialty	Number of providers
Family Medicine	6,823
Internal Medicine	6,534
Psychiatry	1,662
Specialist	1,657

You will see the doctors in the state with the most Part D claims, a breakdown of medical specialties in the state and the top drugs used in the state in Part D. Click on family medicine, the most-popular specialty.

Prescriber Checkup > California > Family Medicine

Top Family Medicine Prescribers in California

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

All States SEARCH

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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Top Prescribers

Providers are grouped by the primary specialty they listed when applying for a national health ID number. This doesn't necessarily mean the person has special training or certification. Specialty is self-reported by providers and may have changed. Patients and claims shown are for Medicare Part D only.

Prescriber	Claims Filled	Total Cost	Medicare Part D Patients	Narcotics	Antipsychotics to Patients Over 65	Dangerous Drugs to Seniors	Brand Name Drugs	Prescription Price
ARMINE NAZARYAN M.D. Family Medicine Glendale CALIFORNIA 91205	53,519	\$3.88M	858 741 are 65+	21% patients receiving narcotics Avg: 19%	7% patients 65+ receiving antipsychotics Avg: 1%	2% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	42% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 20%	\$72 Average prescription price Avg: 59%
TODD FARRER M.D. Family Medicine Bakersfield CALIFORNIA	41,959	\$2.01M	1,370 1,072 are 65+	31% patients receiving narcotics Avg: 19%	7% patients 65+ receiving antipsychotics Avg: 1%	2% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	18% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 20%	\$48 Average prescription price Avg: 59%

Because our comparisons are based around specialty and state, you'll find additional ways of comparing providers on specialty pages. You can sort them by category. So, this is what it looks like if you sort by antipsychotic use among elderly patients:

Top Prescribers

Providers are grouped by the primary specialty they listed when applying for a national health ID number. This doesn't necessarily mean the person has special training or certification. Specialty is self-reported by providers and may have changed. Patients and claims shown are for Medicare Part D only.

Prescriber	Claims Filled	Total Cost	Medicare Part D Patients	Narcotics	Antipsychotics to Patients Over 65	Dangerous Drugs to Seniors	Brand Name Drugs	Prescription Price
GARY SCHELL M.D. Family Medicine Monterey Park CALIFORNIA 91754	433	\$240K	68 25 are 65+	N/A	92% patients 65+ receiving antipsychotics Avg: 1%	N/A	96% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 20%	\$555 Average prescription price Avg: 59%
RENATO PUNSALANG M.D. Family Medicine San Gabriel	422	\$164K	70 58 are 65+	N/A	78% patients 65+ receiving antipsychotics Avg: 1%	N/A	100% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 20%	\$389 Average prescription price Avg: 59%

Search by drug

Go back to app home page (www.propublica.org/checkup). You will see a list of the most-prescribed drugs. There are 500 listed, so you can also do a Control-F and type in the name of the drug you are interested in:

Top Drugs

Drug Name	Total Claims	Total Cost
SIMVASTATIN	40.9M	\$594M
LISINAPRIL	32.7M	\$322M
HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN	31.4M	\$430M
AMLODIPINE BESYLATE	27.9M	\$383M
OMEPRAZOLE	27.4M	\$678M
LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM	27.3M	\$256M
FUROSEMIDE	23.9M	\$133M
METFORMIN HCL	18.8M	\$214M
METOPROLOL TARTRATE	18.5M	\$126M
HYDROCHLOROTHIAZIDE	16.9M	\$95.2M
WARFARIN SODIUM	15.2M	\$179M

Let's take a look at the top prescribers of Nexium, the "Purple Pill." Nexium is a chemical cousin of the generic drug omeperazole (once marketed as Prilosec), which works about the same for most patients. But omeperazole is much cheaper than Nexium, so it makes sense to see why doctors would favor Nexium.

Click on Nexium and here's what you see:

Prescriber Checkup » NEXIUM

NEXIUM

Treats heartburn, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and conditions that cause your stomach to make too much acid. Also helps heal a damaged esophagus. Prevents stomach ulcers and stomach irritation in patients who take pain or arthritis medicine or NSAID. This medicine may be used in combination with antibiotics to treat ulcers. This medicine is a proton pump inhibitor (PPI). [More info »](#)

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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AT A GLANCE: THIS DRUG IN 2011

7.85M Medicare Part D Claims
\$1.97B Retail Cost

Cost by state

State	Claims	Cost
New York	774,055	\$177M
Texas	747,744	\$189M
California	593,190	\$134M
Florida	520,959	\$123M
Ohio	427,628	\$105M
North Carolina	370,030	\$87.2M
Georgia	348,382	\$78.1M
Pennsylvania	332,125	\$82.6M
Tennessee	280,051	\$63.9M
New Jersey	266,300	\$69M

Top prescribers for NEXIUM

1 2 3 4 5 ... [Next >](#) [Last »](#)

Provider	Medicare Claims	City	State
SANG BAIK Internal Medicine	3,829	LOS ANGELES	California
JAE YOO MD Internal Medicine	2,890	LOS ANGELES	California
MOSES HYUN MD	2,756	LOS ANGELES	California
JUNG BAE M.D. Internal Medicine	2,687	LOS ANGELES	California
MARK BARATS Internal Medicine	1,820	WEST HOLLYWOOD	California

You can further delve into the top Nexium prescribers by choosing a state, in this case New York.

Prescriber Checkup » New York » NEXIUM

Top Prescribers of NEXIUM in New York

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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1 2 3 4 5 ... [Next >](#) [Last »](#)

Provider	Medicare Claims	City
CHANG LEE M.D. Internal Medicine	1,699	FLUSHING
YUN HEE CHUNG MD Hematology Oncology	1,630	FLUSHING
ALEKSANDR LIVSHITS M.D. Internal Medicine	1,443	BROOKLYN
YURY ZAMDBORG MD Internal Medicine	1,380	BROOKLYN
VALERI KAZAKOV MD Internal Medicine	1,317	BRONX

If you are a patient being given Nexium, you may want to ask a doctor if there is a less expensive option, like omeprazole. If you are a doctor, you may want to see how you compare to peers. And if you are a researcher or policymaker, you may want to explore the issues related to this.

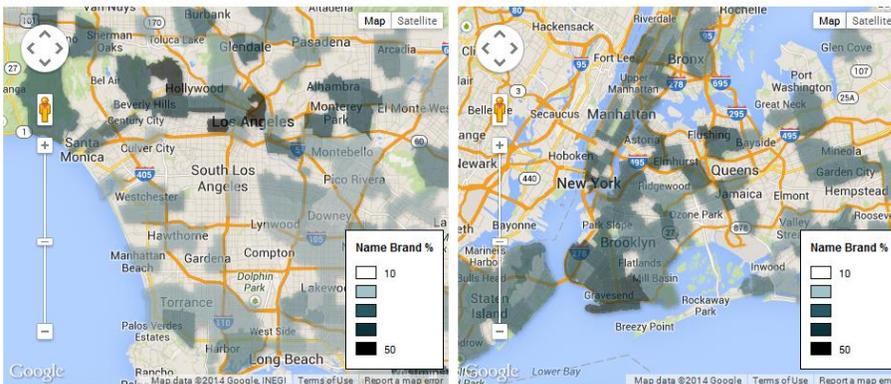
One other interesting area

Beyond looking at individual providers, you may want to look at how prescribing differs by neighborhood. We've created a couple of nifty maps on our website showing major differences in prescribing by primary care doctors in New York City and Los Angeles. Some neighborhoods with high concentrations of foreign-born residents had higher rates of name-brand use than adjacent areas.

Pockets of Doctors in Ethnic Communities Prescribe Drugs Very Differently Than Peers

Los Angeles

New York City



Name-brand prescribing among primary care doctors (internists, family practice, general practice), in Los Angeles and New York City, by zip code tabulation area. Only zip code tabulation areas with 10 or more providers shown. Note: Because Zip Code Tabulation Areas are the Census department's approximation of USPS zip codes, these counts are approximations as well. [Download data.](#)

To search for all providers in a zip code, enter it into the search box above. (For example, Los Angeles' Chinatown.)

You can look at name-brand prescribing rates by state here:

<http://projects.propublica.org/checkup/statebystate>. And you can download data by zip code here: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/propublica/projects/prescribers/name-brand-prescribing-by-zip-code.xlsx>.

Exploring financial relationships

On each provider's landing page is a link to check the doctor within Dollars for Docs, ProPublica's collection of payments that have been publicly disclosed by 15 drug companies. Take Robert Morton, an Oklahoma psychiatrist.

Prescriber Checkup

The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

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[Prescriber Checkup](#) » [Oklahoma](#) » [Ada](#)

ROBERT MORTON MD

1000 ROLLING HILLS LN

Ada | Oklahoma | 74820

(580) 279-9248

[Incorrect Info?](#)

[Search this name in Dollars for Docs »](#)

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

All States

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

[Read our FAQ](#)

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In Dollars for Docs, here's a sample of what you would find:

ROBERT O MORTON »	OKEMAH	Okla.	Forest	2012	Travel	\$28,363
ROBERT O MORTON »	OKEMAH	Okla.	Forest	2012	Meals	\$1,605
ROBERT O MORTON »	OKEMAH	Okla.	Forest	2012	Speaking	\$50,750
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2009	Speaking	\$7,250
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2009	Travel	\$366
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2010	Speaking	\$15,250
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2010	Meals	\$640
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2010	Travel	\$2,154
ROBERT OLIVER MORTON »	ADA	Okla.	Pfizer	2011	Travel	\$349

If doctors receive payments from drug companies, you may want to ask whether these financial relationships affected their prescribing.

Feedback

We are always interested in feedback on this tool. Drop us a note at drugs@propublica.org. And our full methodology is available here: <http://www.propublica.org/article/how-we-analyzed-medicares-drug-data-long-methodology>.