Keep Medicare prescription drug program humming along

Kelly P. Gillespie

It’s 2013, and as we watch the machinations of Washington, D.C.’s, response to the national economic situation, every citizen is expecting to pay more in taxes, whether we want to or not, and get less in government services. It is our current reality, and citizens seem united in expecting our elected officials to work together toward thoughtful compromises.

Medicare Part D is a federal program to subsidize the costs of prescription drugs for Medicare beneficiaries. This program has only been around since 2006, but a recent study revealed 85 percent of enrollees reported being satisfied with their drug plan.

As a world-class center for life science research, Missouri has a big stake in protecting Medicare Part D. Our state enjoys and increasingly relies upon the new investment and new business development fueled by the biopharmaceutical sector. Missouri has cultivated a highly esteemed community of researchers as national research leaders like Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Missouri and St. Louis University continue to build their biomedical research depth. Our university researcher teams successfully develop new products that not only make us healthier, but that also help contribute to the health of our state’s economy.

Now in its eighth year, Medicare Part D has exceeded expectations and is the rare government program that consistently comes in under budget. According to the Congressional Budget Office figures, Part D is operating at 42 percent — or $435 billion — below initial projections. In early August, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released its projection for average Medicare Part D premiums for 2013: $30 per month. That is 50 percent less than originally projected in 2004.

These savings are a direct correlative to the fact that under the current system of private market-based competition, Part D offers a broad spectrum of options that provide enrollees access to the medicines and cures they need. Studies back basic common sense and show that adherence to doctors’ orders improves overall health and reduces the need for costly, avoidable hospitalizations.

When a government program is effective, that’s when the temptation of change inevitably leads to dumb moves in the name of reform. The seniors like this program, the government knows it is affordable — but be watchful as here comes the throwback ideas of price controls, imposed
rebates, and rationed care which will imperil the core benefits of Medicaid Part D and set off a far-reaching ripple effect.

If you are a user of Part D medicines, be sure to thank a U.S. researcher that played a part in discovering this treatment. Also, thank your U.S. senator for building a model government program that works for seniors, and ask them to be thoughtful as they balance the nation’s needs.

*Kelly P. Gillespie is executive director of the Missouri Biotechnology Association.*
Alert fails to mention that tornado warning was just a drill

Phone message confused some.

An automated phone alert sent to University of Missouri students, staff and faculty yesterday mistakenly said the National Weather Service had issued a tornado warning for Boone County and to "take cover immediately."

A simultaneous campus alert via email clarified it was a test message and that "there is no severe weather occurring at this time." However, the phone alert gave no indication the message was only a drill.

MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said the erroneous warning was the result of a glitch in the system that communicates National Weather Service alerts to the university's notification system. However, a National Weather Service official said today the error was made by the university's notification system, which is handled by an outside vendor.

"As far as we know, there was no glitch on our end," said Jim Kramper, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in St. Louis. "The test warning went out exactly the way it was supposed to."

Banken said the system used by MU scans the National Weather Service system for emergency notices, and when an alert is activated for Boone County, the message is sent out to MU Alert users via phone, email and text messages.

"We didn't actually know that the National Weather Service was going to send an alert," Banken said. She said the coding attached to the NWS alert included an "O," meaning "operational" — an actual emergency — rather than "T" for "test."

The university posted a notice on the MU Alert website at 3:30 p.m. explaining the earlier phone messages.

"During the test last year, the National Weather Service did not activate their system since it was only a test, and we assumed the same protocols would be followed this year," Banken said.
Kramper said the weather service did nothing different yesterday than it did for last year's statewide drill, which was announced in advance. "The coding was correct," he said.

Banken pointed to a national news story about a similar glitch that occurred Monday in Wisconsin, in which case National Weather Service meteorologists acknowledged that an in-house emergency warning test was publicly disseminated with the "O" code, giving the appearance that an actual tornado outbreak was occurring.

Kramper said he was aware of other automated systems in Missouri, including a "reverse 911" warning system, that failed to recognize the simulated warning as a test.

"If nothing else, it showed the system works," Kramper said. "In a sense, that's what the test is for. This is why we do these things."

Banken said MU officials will continue to examine the situation.

"We'll be looking into it to see if there was anything we could have done to have prevented it," she said.
Mizzou sends out false tornado alert

18 hours ago

The University of Missouri in Columbia had to recall an errant tornado alert that turned out to be part of a routine National Weather Service test.

The Columbia Missourian (bit.ly/W3xegX) reports that the university sent the erroneous text messages and automated phone calls Tuesday afternoon to students and employees who subscribe to its emergency alert system. The messages warned of a possible tornado in Boone County.

A university spokesman says the university was not aware in advance that the Weather Service planned a statewide drill as part of National Severe Weather Week. A campus contractor automatically issues the emergency alerts.

E-mail alerts included the disclaimer that the tornado warning was a test. The text and phone messages were prerecorded.
By Katie Yaeger
March 6, 2013 | 6:12 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — UM System President Tim Wolfe will spend Friday morning talking with Moberly eighth- and ninth-graders about the value of higher education.

This trip is the first in a tour of Missouri communities to deliver his Show Me Value message, which emphasizes the personal and societal benefits higher education can provide.

In Wolfe’s presentation, he will discuss how higher education changed his life and gave him a focus, UM System spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said. His presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer session.

After Wolfe leaves the schools, he will meet with local education, business and civic leaders to discuss barriers for attending college, ways to get more people to attend college and ways higher education leaders can promote the value of higher education in the community.

He will also tour Orscheln Properties in Moberly and discuss how higher education prepares people for the workplace. Wolfe said in his year-end wish list that he wanted to talk with Missourians about higher education funding issues.

Wolfe wanted to tour partly because of the November 2012 defeat of Proposition B, Hollingshead said. According to state estimates, this proposed tobacco tax increase would have generated between $280 million and $420 million, 80 percent of which would have funded higher education. The proposition was defeated by more than 2-1 in rural counties.

Wolfe also wanted to tour because of recent national questioning of the value of higher education and encouragement to find alternatives to a four-year degree program, Hollingshead said. One of his concerns is that this questioning is causing the message of the importance of college to get lost. He will visit St. Joseph on March 22. Other trips are being planned and will continue to be planned for the remainder of the year, Hollingshead said.

Supervising editor is Elizabeth Brixey.
MU 'incredibly committed' to Innovation Park

Blue Springs, MO — Local business leaders on Thursday got a broad sampling of the programs and services the University of Missouri could bring to the Mizzou Center. That facility is seen as a key part of developing the Missouri Innovation Park, which would be home to companies in high-growth, high-paying industries such as the life sciences and sustainable energy.

“We’re just incredibly committed to making this work,” MU Provost Brian Foster told a group of business leaders and others convened by the Blue Springs Economic Development Corp.

The Mizzou Center remains in blueprint phase, half of that space for various MU programs and half to be leased to private interests. Brien Starnes, president of the EDC, said that corporate commitment is the needed next step to get the facility built.

Thursday’s event — during which MU officials described a wide variety of programs and assets — was a chance for local businesses to take a closer look at just what they might want to use. MU and EDC surveyed participants and asked for lots of comments and plan to follow up one on one.

“What are the definitive programming elements that Mizzou wants to put in there for which there is a demand?” Starnes said.

As MU officials outlined it, much of what Innovation Park would be focused on would line up well under what the university calls the “Mizzou Advantage.”

“What are the things that we can do that the others can’t?” Foster said.

Drawing from many of its prominent and highly ranked schools — agriculture, medicine, veterinary medicine, engineering, journalism — the university has identified four areas of strength: health, food, sustainable energy and “media of the future.”

“Those are four areas where we would argue we’re in a position to be world class,” Foster said.

There were specifics, too.

For example, the university has a research reactor, the largest at any public university in the country. It’s used to make isotopes for drugs that are used in, for example, cancer treatment.
“We have the ability to basically design drugs right there on campus,” Carolyn Henry of the One Health/One Medicine program. A new drug then might be tested in Kansas City, officials have said, because the population base in Columbia just isn’t big enough for many large-scale tests.

More broadly, many see an emerging bioscience corridor along Interstate 70 from Columbia (MU) to Manhattan, Kan. (Kansas State University), and Kansas City has a number of players in that field, which includes makers of products for both human and animal health as well as areas such clinical testing. The idea behind the Innovation Park to get and grow some of those companies.

MU wasn’t really focused on all that when it identified its “Mizzou Advantage” strengths, “but the fit with the Kansas City area is, I think, quite stunning,” Foster said.

The Missouri Innovation Park would be east of Adams Dairy Parkway in Blue Springs, south of where Target and Kohl’s are. It would be near the Adams Dairy Golf Club (and a couple of holes might have to be altered – but they would be improved, golfers were assured). The Mizzou Center would be highly visible from Adams Dairy Parkway.

Moving ahead with the Mizzou Center will require approval from the MU Board of Curators.

“We basically have to make an entire business case,” Starner said.
Hispanic faculty organization reinvents itself with new name

By Dani Kass
March 6, 2013 | 10:11 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The board members of MU’s "HLAFSA" were tired of people getting confused at the jumbled letters of their organization's name, and decided last year that it was time for a change.

In September, members of the organization voted, and the MU Hispanic Latin American Faculty and Staff Association was set to be renamed MU Voz Latina, effective Thursday.

"HLAFSA is very representative of what we are, but probably one of the issues was that because it’s just the initials, sometimes people were wondering, ‘What does this mean?’” said Irma Arteaga, a staff representative, assistant professor at MU and a native of Peru.

The new name, which translates to Latino Voice, is meant to be more inclusive with the community, said President Miguel Ayllón, an MU study abroad adviser who is also from Peru.

“For the most part, regardless if (someone) speaks English or not, they will understand it,” Ayllón said. “It will appeal to their hearts. We represent the Latino faculty and the Latino staff, but with the change of name we also get closer to the community.”

Along with a name change, the organization changed logos, websites and its social media use. Voz Latina will be hosting an open house Thursday to celebrate the changes. The event will include guest speakers and traditional Latino food, including tamales and tres leches cake, according to a news release from Voz Latina.

The organization, which formed in 1999, currently has 75 active members. The free membership is open to faculty, staff and students, and is not limited to Latinos.

A factor in deciding to revitalize the organization was a recent stagnation in membership, despite earlier momentum, Ayllón said. He partially attributes the stagnation to natural
transitions in leadership, and said these types of obstacles are something many MU organizations must face.

Voz Latina will work to bring members of the Hispanic and Latino community together in Columbia. Arteaga said it was a vital part of her becoming connected at MU.

“Especially being in a small town, it’s very important to have this connection,” Arteaga said.

In the past, the group has worked with Hispanic and Latino undergraduate and graduate organizations, and Ayllón said he hopes to strengthen that connection now.

“We want to support them, encourage them, build them up, mentor them and work with them,” he said. “In the past we have done some mixer events where we have faculty, staff and students hanging out together, talking about potential projects and recommendation letters.”

The organization will continue to provide social events for its own members, like a picnic in September during National Hispanic Awareness Month and an end-of-the semester gathering in December.

Ayllón said the organization will be starting meetings called mesa de diálogo, which translates to “dialogue table.” At these meetings, members of the organization and community can bring up academic or professional projects or simply just tell their personal story.

“We want to do social events because as Latinos we cherish community, family and being together, but we also want to address the academic and professional needs that we have,” Ayllón said.

*Supervising editor is Zach Murdock.*
Women's history talk looks at feminism online

Events continue through month.

By Karyn Spory

Like most aspects of life, feminism has taken on a digital presence, but a University of Missouri women's and gender studies assistant professor says activism cannot simply consist of retweeting a message.

Treva Lindsey and about 30 MU students gathered at the Women's Center last night for a discussion about feminism in the digital age. It was one of several Women's History Month events on campus this month, sponsored by the Women's Center.

Lindsey said she knew few people who would identify themselves specifically as an online feminist. "It is this combining of those things," using the Internet as a tool to get out messages, she said.

"At what point are we just talking and not working?" graduate student Suzy Day asked.

Lindsey, who identifies online under the name Diva Feminist, discussed how feminism has gone from "IRL" — in real life — discussions to virtual activism and how the two must work together to succeed.

"How we think about practices and how we think about activism is based in and rooted in this online presence and engagement," Lindsey said.

Lindsey noted Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as a good example of how the "URL and IRL" worked together through virtual volunteerism.

"A number of women, especially women who self-identify as feminist activists, use the Internet to coordinate and tell people how" and where "to get resources," Lindsey said.

She said real-life interaction might allow for more expansive ideas, but an online presence can allow activists to reach a broader audience.
Day agreed the Internet is great for organizing but thought the audience might be limited.

"I sometimes worry it's very 'preaching to the choir,'" Day said. "You're not going to meet a stranger online, tweet something and then change their mind on all these issues."

Struby Struble, coordinator of MU’s LGBTQ Resource Center, said she sees it differently.

"I feel, running the LGBTQ Twitter, I get all sorts of people that follow my Twitter that might not ever walk into the room with rainbow flags," Struble said.

Other Women's History Month events at the university include:

- "Women in the Arts" gallery show reception, 4 to 6 p.m. tomorrow at the MSA/GPA Craft Studio, N12 Memorial Union.
- "Women in Academic Leadership Programs" panel discussion, 3:30 to 5 p.m. Friday in Room S204, Memorial Union South.
- "InsideOut: Queer Women in History" radio show, 3 to 4 p.m. March 20 on KCOU-88.1 FM.
MU forestry students take maple syrup to market

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) - University of Missouri forestry students have created maple syrup with a black and gold touch.

The Columbia Missourian reports the MU Ag Foundation provided a $15,000 grant to help students and landowners produce "MUple" (MEW'-puhl) syrup.

Ten students at the university's Baskett Wildlife Research and Education Center near Ashland worked on the pancake-ready project. They purchased 100 taps and a new evaporator to remove water from the tree sap.

The time is right to tap the trees. The state Department of Conservation says that peak season for collecting syrup occurs when nighttime temperatures fall below freezing.