



Discrepancies in Ear Drop Prices

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study was conducted to evaluate the variability and discrepancies among the most commonly prescribed eardrops sold at pharmacies in Southern California, which is home to 22 million individuals.

Methods: In this prospective study, we selected 11 commonly used eardrops to treat otologic disorders. Our called randomly selected drug stores in 3 major localities in Southern California: Orange County, San Diego County, and Los Angeles County. In addition to prices collected, the mean income of pharmacy zip code was cross-referenced. Mean, range, minimum and maximum prices for each drug were calculated and analyzed.

Results: Data was collected from 108 pharmacies. The mean price, maximum price, minimum price and standard deviation, are noted respectively for each individual drug: Cortisporin- brand (\$42.81, \$105.00, \$25.00, \$18.89); Cortisporin- generic (\$42.04, \$103.00, \$29.00, \$20.89); Floxin- generic (\$99.95, \$174.00, \$15.00, \$50.06); Sulfacetamide- generic (\$40.18, \$100.00, \$9.00, \$20.49); Ciprodex- brand (\$194.44, \$281.32, \$29.00, \$33.24); CiproHC- brand (\$233.32, \$299.99, \$112.37, \$35.34); Vosol- brand (\$120.75, \$274.00, \$25.00, \$89.35); Vosol- generic (\$116.55, \$226.60, \$34.99, \$64.25); VosolHC- brand (\$201.53, \$300.48, \$34.99, \$44.48); Domeboro- generic (\$22.91, \$94.60, \$4.60, \$20.66) and Tobradex-brand (\$166.47, \$338.00, \$44.00, \$58.67).

Conclusions: There is significant variability among the prices of eardrops across different pharmacies in Southern California. Patients are best served by a thorough pricing inquiry if required to pay out of pocket for their eardrops. A searchable, state-mandated reporting of drug prices for the general population may help reduce costs of drugs by creating competition among pharmacies.

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INTRODUCTION

- Based on the report provided by Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC), during 2009 to 2012, approximately 48.7% of people in United States had used one prescription drug during at least one month of the year.¹
- Drug prices vary significantly within and across countries as a result of pharmaceutical companies applying different policies in various countries.²
- Patients with difficulty paying for prescribed medications are at increased risk for morbidity and mortality due to a lack of treatment.³
- In the current study, we aimed to evaluate the **variability and discrepancies among the most commonly prescribed ear drops**. As a result, we **reviewed pharmacy prices in Southern California**, home to 22 million individuals of various socio-economic backgrounds.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

- This prospective study, **assessed 11 commonly prescribed ear drops** used to treat various otologic disorders.
- Randomly selected drug stores in 3 major localities in Southern California was studied. Locations include; Orange County, San Diego County, and Los Angeles County.
- Data was collected from phone calls to pharmacy's.
- Drug prices, mean, range, minimum and maximum prices** for each drug were calculated and analyzed.
- The average adjusted gross income was obtained for each zip code corresponding to the pharmacies in question. Data was retrieved from public records released from the IRS.

RESULTS

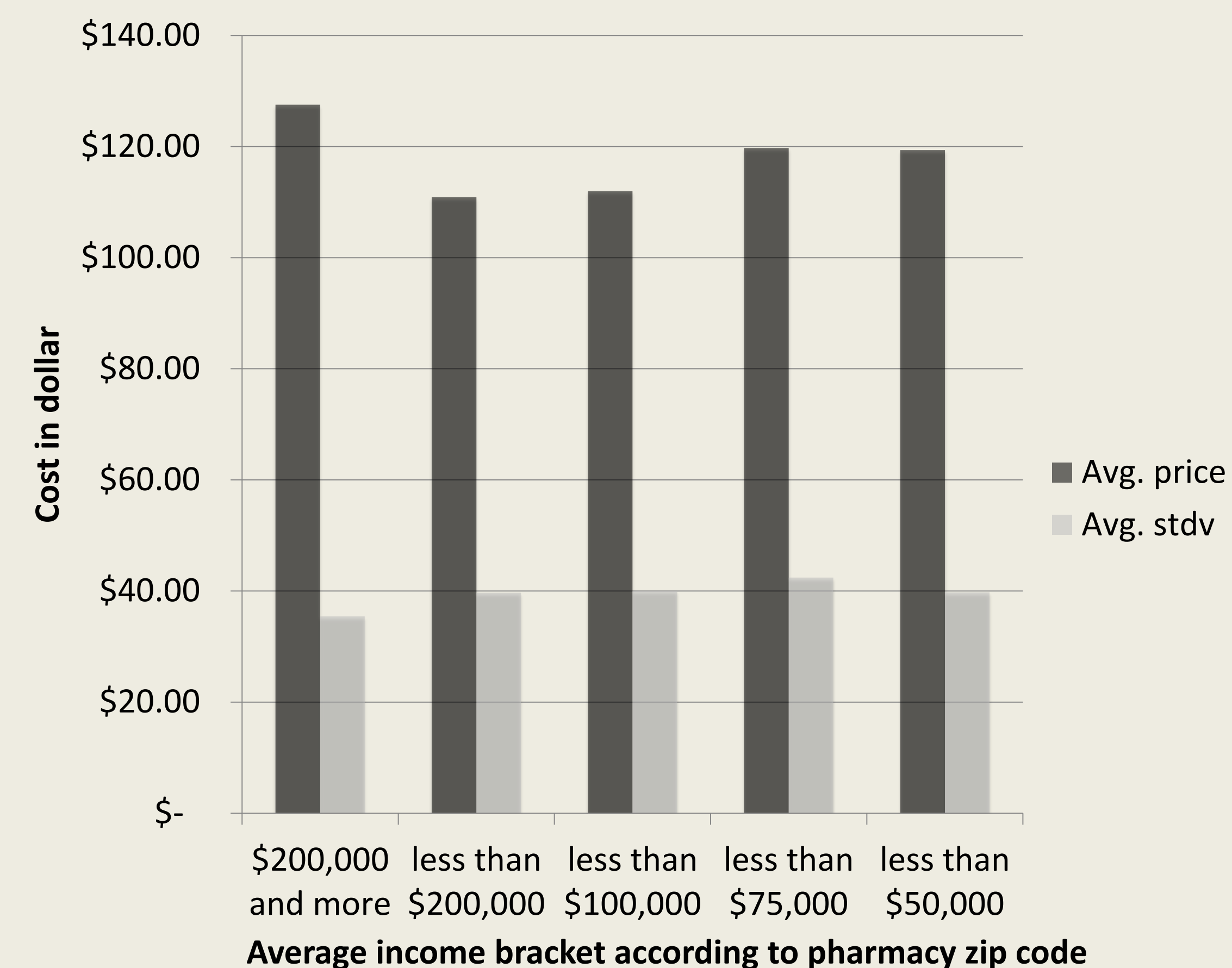
Table 2: Drug Costs – Sorted by Price

Drug name	Average	Max	Min	Standard Dev
Domeboro (generic) 60 ml	\$22.91	\$94.60	\$4.60	\$20.66
Sulfacetamide (generic) 15ml	\$40.18	\$100.00	\$9.00	\$20.49
Cortisporin (generic) 10ml	\$42.04	\$103.00	\$29.00	\$20.89
Cortisporin (brand) 10ml	\$42.81	\$105.00	\$25.00	\$18.89
Floxin (generic) 10ml	\$99.95	\$174.00	\$15.00	\$50.06
Vosol (generic) 10 ml	\$116.55	\$226.60	\$34.99	\$64.25
Vosol (brand) 15ml	\$120.75	\$274.00	\$25.00	\$89.35
Tobradex (brand) 5 ml	\$166.47	\$338.00	\$44.00	\$58.67
Ciprodex (brand) 7.5ml	\$194.44	\$281.32	\$29.00	\$33.24
VosolHC (brand) 10 ml	\$201.53	\$300.48	\$34.99	\$44.48
CiproHC (brand) 10ml	\$233.32	\$299.99	\$112.37	\$35.34

Table 2: Drug Prices vs Income Levels Within The Same Zip Code

Income bracket	Mean Price	Mean Max Price	Mean Min Price	Mean Standard Deviation
\$200,000 and more	\$127.54	\$175.21	\$78.51	\$35.43
less than \$200,000	\$110.88	\$183.31	\$47.94	\$39.69
less than \$100,000	\$111.99	\$169.89	\$47.05	\$40.00
less than \$75,000	\$119.74	\$179.17	\$63.85	\$42.40
less than \$50,000	\$119.36	\$178.85	\$67.97	\$39.75

Figure 1. Comparison of price and distribution between various income locations



DISCUSSION

- Significant variation in drug prices exist
- May need governmental regulation, but that price control may stifle pharmacological research and progress.^{4,5}
- To date Missouri, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, and New York have established a state sponsored prescription drug price registry. This allows for an easy comparison of drug prices according to patient location. In California, no database exists that contains accurate medication costs for the uninsured.
- The creation of a state mandated database will encourage business to the pharmacies offering the cheapest medications- thus increasing competition.
- This competition will ultimately protect patients from significant variations in prescription eardrop prices.

CONCLUSIONS

- The significant variation between drug prices seen in this study is alarming, showing the unique challenges faced by those who must pay out of pocket for medication.
- A searchable, state-mandated reporting of drug can potentially solve this problem experienced by the uninsured.

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