

Five Most Commonly Used Types of Pharmaceuticals

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INTRODUCTION

The Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) is a powerful tool for analyzing the Medicare population. Based on a stratified random sample, we can derive information about the health care use, expenditure, and financing of Medicare's 36 million enrollees. We can also learn about those enrollees' health status, living arrangements, and access to and satisfaction with health care.

Figures 1-4 show the five most frequently mentioned types of prescription drugs among all community-based Medicare beneficiaries in total and by several breakdowns, based on data from the 1995 MCBS cost and use file.

FINDINGS

The results show that among all community-based beneficiaries, the most commonly mentioned drugs were cardiac drugs, cardiovascular drugs, diuretics, psychotherapeutic drugs, and gastrointestinal preparations, respectively (Figure 1). Looking at the same data by gender (Figure 2) showed that males used cardiac drugs and cardiovascular drugs somewhat more often than females and that females

used diuretics, psychotherapeutic drugs, and gastrointestinal preparations somewhat more often than males.

Drug use by age group showed some interesting trends (Figure 3). Among the disabled, psychotherapeutic drugs were the most commonly mentioned; the use of this class of drug dropped dramatically with beneficiaries 65 years of age or older. The frequency of cardiac drugs and cardiovascular drugs followed similar trends through 74 years of age. Starting with those beneficiaries 75 years of age, cardiac drugs became more frequently mentioned at the same time that cardiovascular drugs became less frequently mentioned.

Looking at the most common therapeutic classes of pharmaceuticals by Supplemental Insurance Classification (Figure 4) showed similar results in most classifications. Cardiac drugs were the most frequently mentioned drug in all Supplemental Insurance Classifications. Those beneficiaries who had no supplemental insurance, were covered by Medicaid (buy-in), or who switched coverage had significantly higher use of psychotherapeutic drugs than in the other classifications. Those with employer-sponsored supplemental insurance used cardiovascular drugs more frequently than any other classification while those who switched coverage used them least frequently.

The authors are with the Office of Strategic Planning, Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of HCFA.

Figure 1
Five Most Common Drugs Mentioned by All Community-Based Beneficiaries

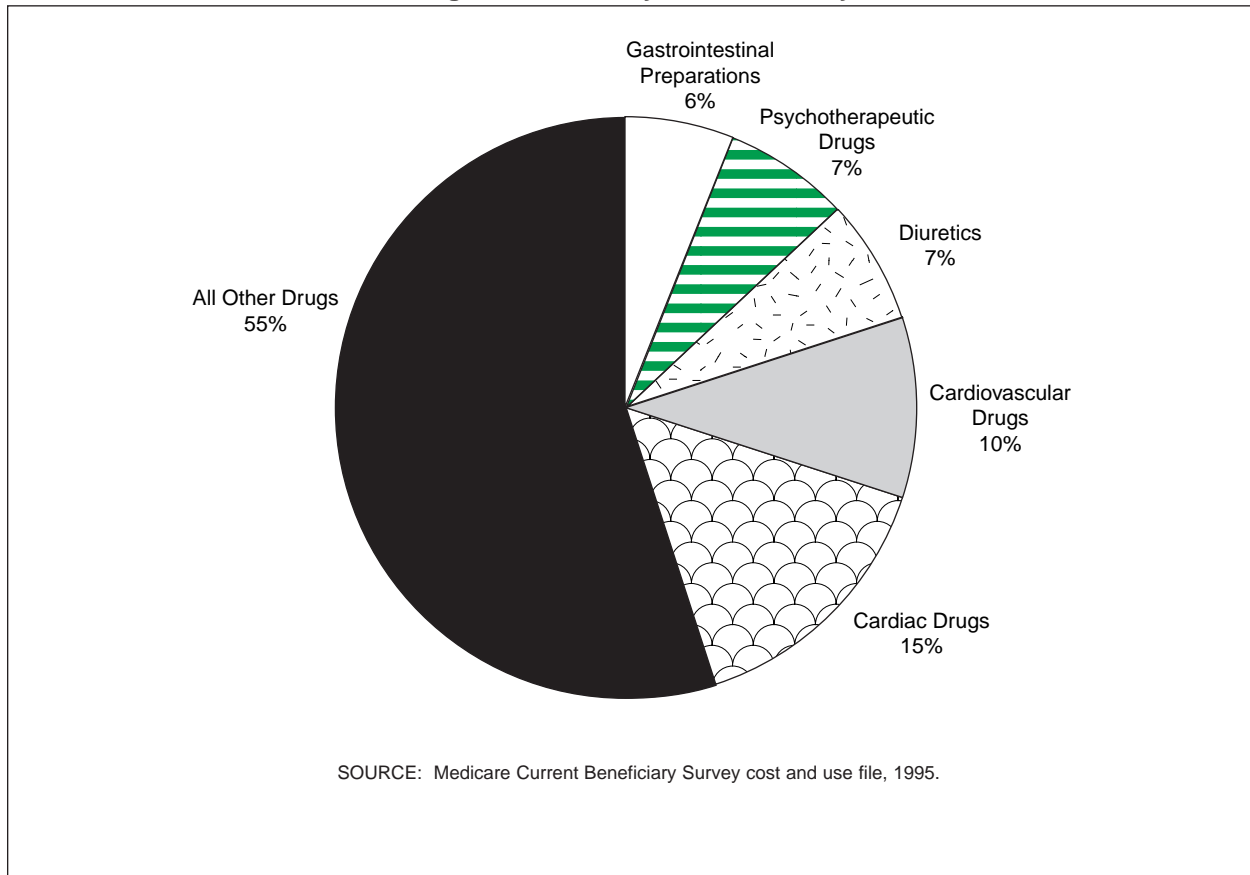


Figure 2

Five Most Common Drugs Mentioned by All Community-Based Beneficiaries, by Gender

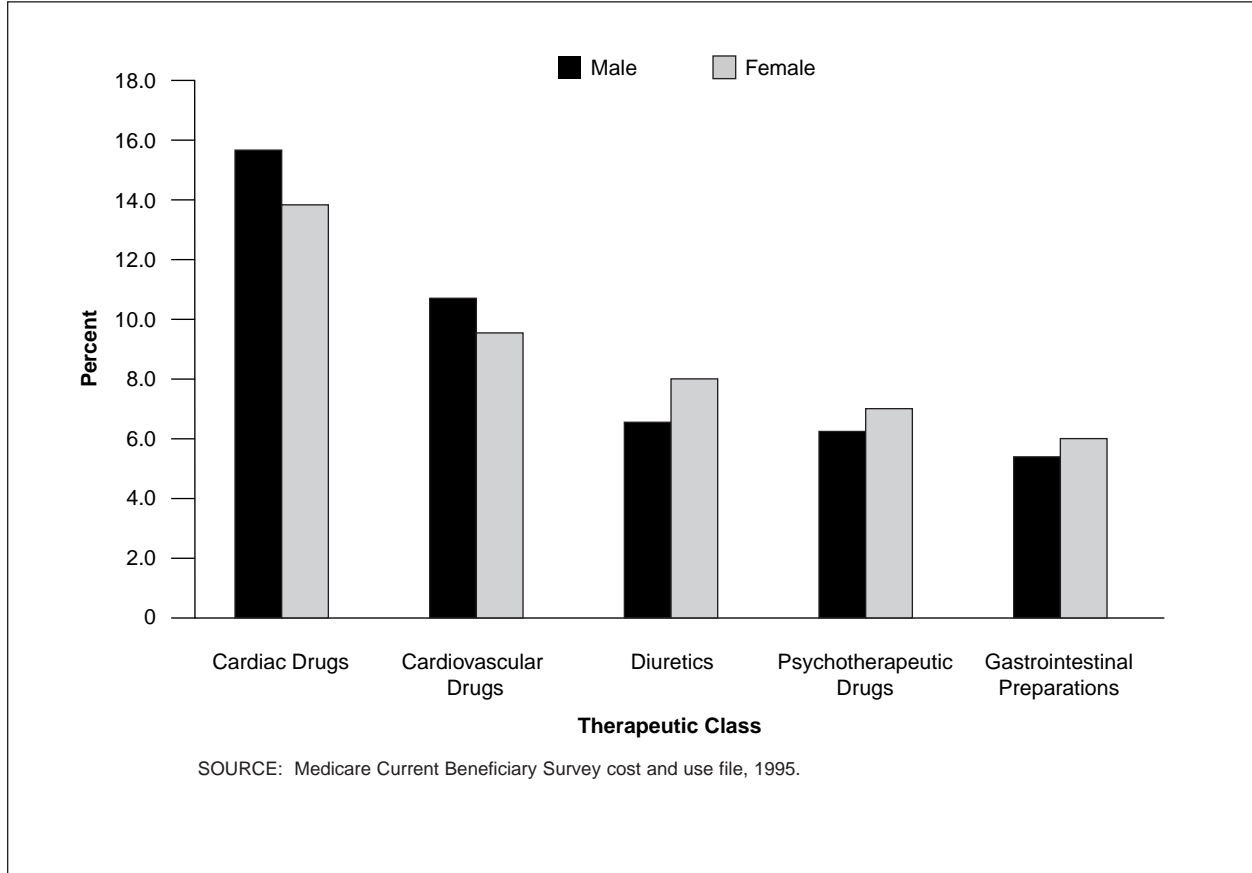


Figure 3

Five Most Common Drugs Mentioned by All Community-Based Beneficiaries, by Age Group

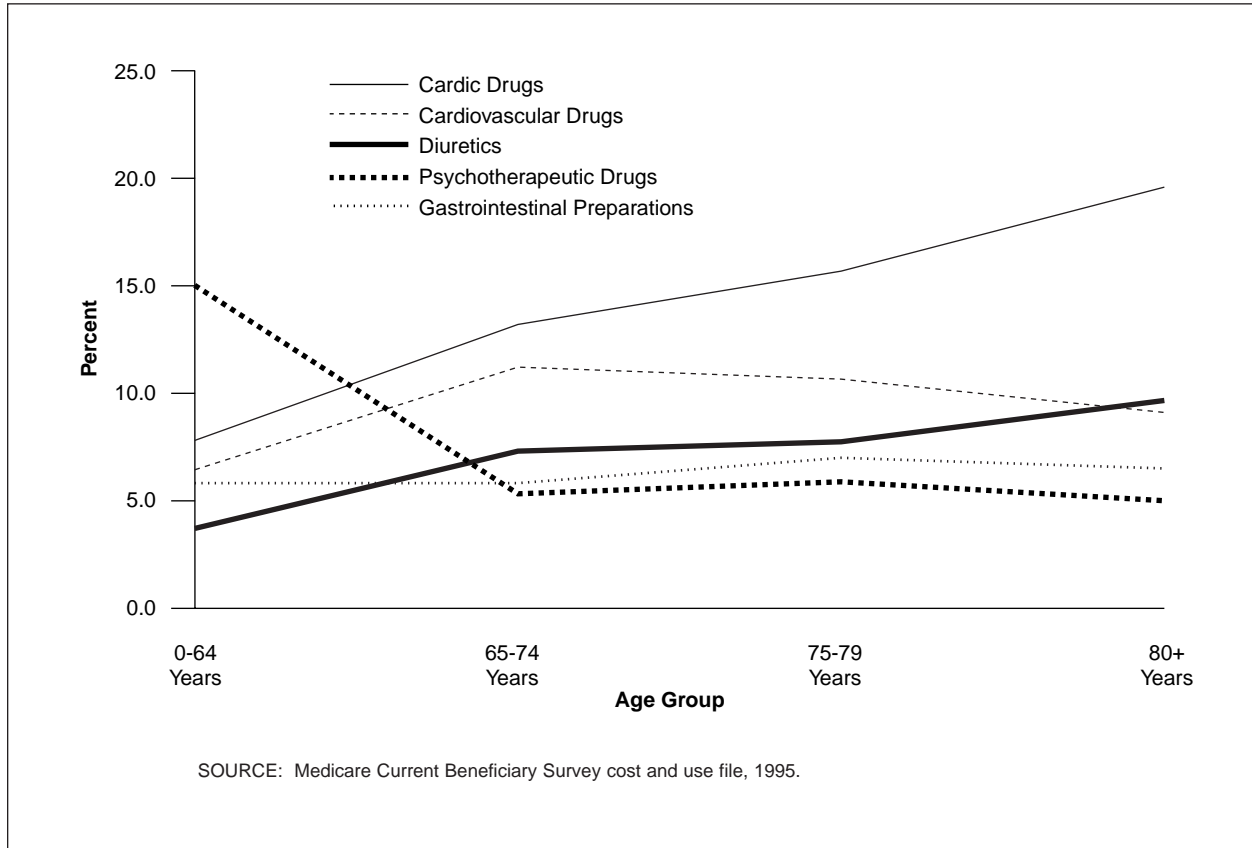
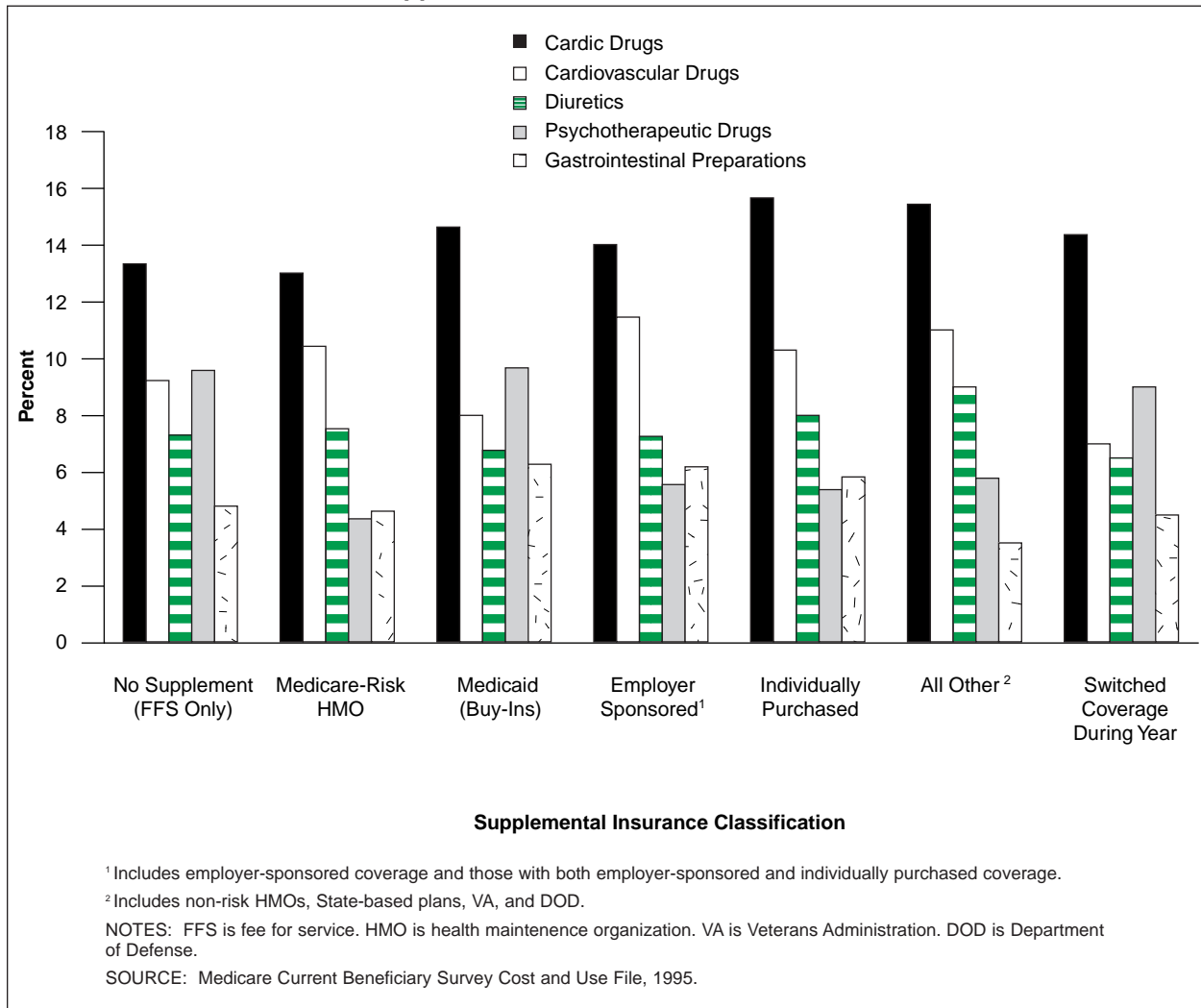


Figure 4
Five Most Common Drugs Mentioned by All Community-Based Beneficiaries, by Supplemental Insurance Classification



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