

appealed to the insurer, and then an outside reviewer in New York, for more coverage. The case ended in 2013 with the insurer doubling the number of garments it covered. The insurer changed its policy the following year to allow patients with post-mastectomy garments to go beyond their limit.

After Cronick switched to her husband's health plan, she received other denials that she was forced to appeal, she said. She filed a complaint against the insurer with the Department of Labor, according to documents Cronick provided. As of Sept. 5, the investigation was still pending.

"It shouldn't be a certain number," Cronick said, referring to the number of garments covered under health plans. "It should be what that patient and their doctor determine is required."

That option is not available to Medicare beneficiaries. Compression garments do not meet the definition for any category of covered services. Legislation to provide Medicare coverage for lymphedema diagnosis and treatment has been repeatedly introduced

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in Congress since 2002. But it has gone nowhere.

Advocates said they think adding the government benefit would prompt more private insurers to pay for the stockings as well. The federal program's reputation for being a benchmark of insurance coverage "makes this super valuable to get Medicare" to cover the garments, said Jeffrey Clemens, an associate professor of economics at UC San Diego who focuses on health issues.

But other health care experts say it may not be the cure-all advocates hope for.

"It's probably not a simple matter of 'if you succeed in getting Medicare coverage, then all the private insurers are going to fall in line really rapidly,'" said Jack Hoadley, a former member of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. "I would say that's probably not realistic." □

WEEKLY DOSE



Another reason to nix trans fats

We all know that trans fats are bad for us, but a new study published in the journal *Neurology* has now linked trans fats to Alzheimer's disease—the resulting data suggests a 50 percent to 75 percent increase in the risk of dementia for those with a diet heavy in trans fats. Researchers followed 1,600 Japanese men and women without dementia over a 10-year period. People with the highest levels of trans fats in their blood were found to be more likely to develop dementia than those with the lowest levels, as both the brain and the cardiovascular system are affected dramatically by trans fats. So, what are these dangerous fats and where do they come from? They are a type of unsaturated fat that naturally occurs in small amounts in meat and milk products and in alarmingly high amounts in processed foods containing partially hydrogenated oils.

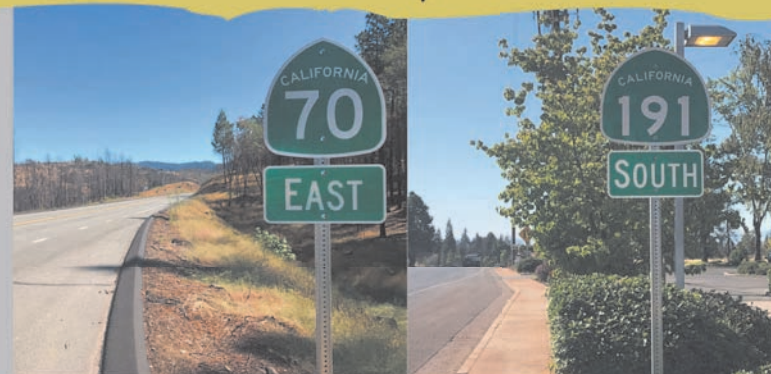
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