

Using Prescriber Checkup: A Quick Guide

UPDATED December 2014: 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 about 38 million people and pays for more than 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 Like 81

By Jeff Larson, Jennifer LaFleur, Charles Ornstein, Tracy Weber and Lena Groeger, ProPublica, Updated Dec. 15, 2014

Medicare’s popular prescription-drug program serves 38 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 2012. | [Update Dec. 15, 2014: As Controlled Substance Use Rises in Medicare, Prolific Prescribers Face Scrutiny](#)

Interested in downloading the data? Go to the [ProPublica Data Store](#).

How States Compare

Percent claims for name-brand drugs from primary care physicians, 2012. [See state by state data](#) »

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

All States
SEARCH

State	Top 500 Drug Cost	Top Drugs	Total Claims	Total Cost
National	\$71.8B	SIMVASTATIN	36.6M	\$479M
Alabama	\$1.25B	LISINAPRIL	33.7M	\$289M
Alaska	\$80.5M	HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN	32.9M	\$461M
Arizona	\$1.16B	EUTHYRAXINE SODIUM	99.0M	\$293M

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 » Search for Mark Smith

7,396 Results for “Mark Smith”

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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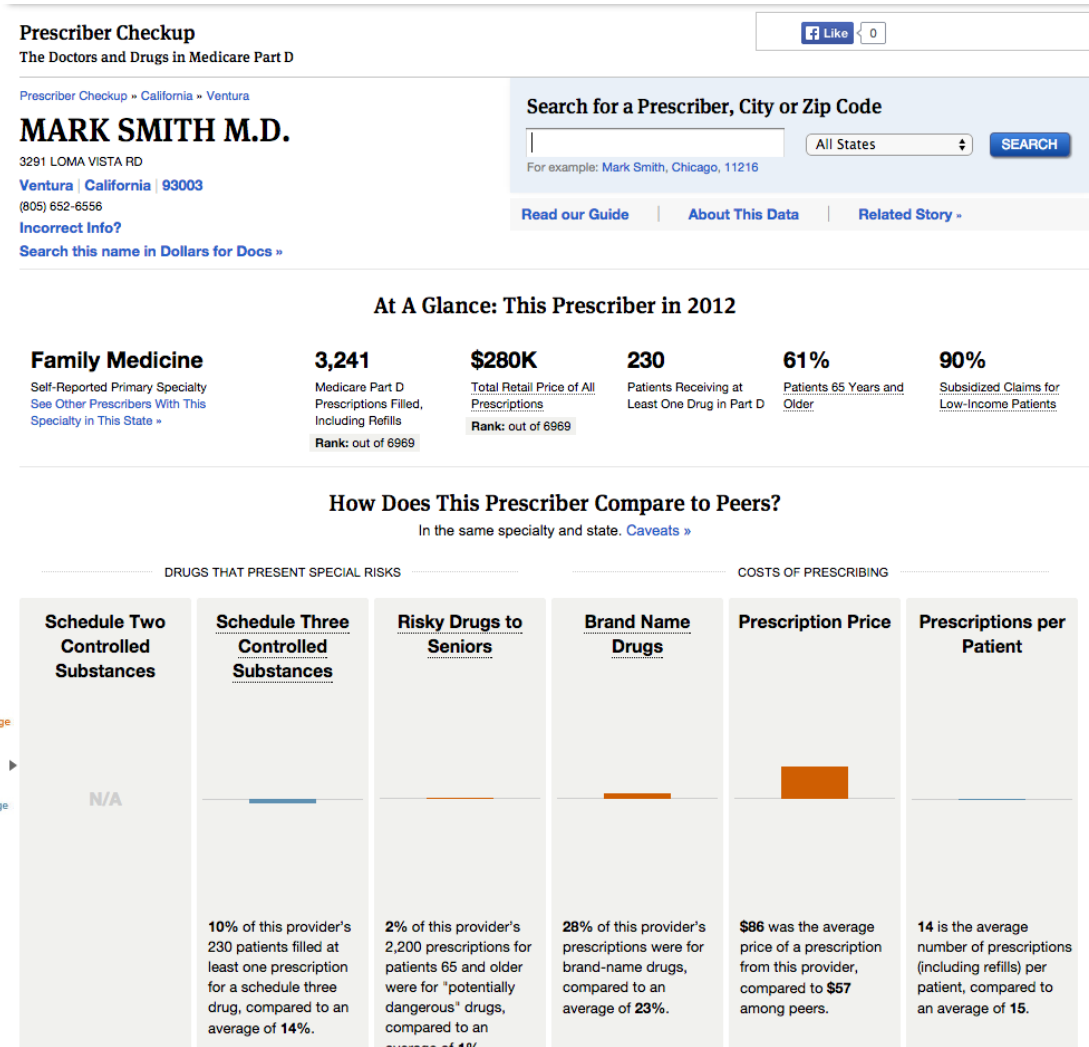
What's Not Here: To be included, a provider had to write 50 or more prescriptions for at least one drug in Medicare Part D in 2012. Medications provided at an office visit or hospital aren't included because they are covered by other parts of Medicare. Prescriptions also are not included for Medicare 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 Southfield Michigan 48075	684	\$8,478	353	6%
MARK SMITH MD Emergency Medicine Columbus Ohio 43221	1,031	\$31.1K	216	14%
MARK SMITH MD Family Medicine Charlevoix Michigan 49720	952	\$55.9K	196	22%

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:

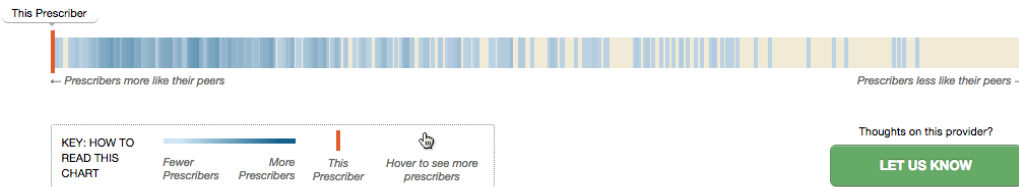


At the top, you will see his contact information. Then you'll see some top-line statistics, including the number of Medicare Part D patients for whom he wrote prescriptions in 2012, the number of prescriptions they filled, the retail cost of those prescriptions, as well as some demographic data. Below 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 2012. (We only display drugs the doctor prescribed at least 50 times, including refills).

This Prescriber's Drugs

The table below lists 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

- S2** A schedule two drug. [More >](#)
- S3** A schedule three drug. [More >](#)
- A** An antipsychotic drug. [More >](#)
- R** A risky drug for seniors. [More >](#)
- 10** 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 >](#)

Drug Name	Total Prescriptions Filled Including Refills	Prescriptions to 65+	Category	THIS DRUG'S RANK	
				For this Prescriber	For All Prescribers in This Specialty in California
HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN Used to relieve moderate to... +	196	124	S3	1	3
LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM Levothyroxine, a thyroid ho... +	150	75		2	5
METFORMIN HCL Metformin is used alone or ... +	124	85		3	7
SIMVASTATIN Treats high cholesterol and... +	124	76		3	1
ATORVASTATIN CALCIUM Used together with diet, we... +	106	75		5	11

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: Schedule 2 (most addictive) controlled substances, Schedule 3 controlled substances, 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:

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

All States SEARCH

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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 27 providers. You can explore them and sort them by number of claims, number of patients, cost and percentage of name-brand drugs.

Prescriber Checkup

The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

Prescriber Checkup - Search for 11216

27 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
JULIEN ELIZEE M.D. Internal Medicine Brooklyn New York 11216	3,410	\$163K	114	26%
FRANTZ FILS SAINT-LOUIS M.D. Family Medicine Brooklyn New York 11216	3,673	\$209K	204	28%

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	\$1.25B
Alaska	\$80.5M
Arizona	\$1.16B
Arkansas	\$774M
California	\$7.42B
Colorado	\$756M
Connecticut	\$997M
Delaware	\$220M
District of Columbia	\$120M
Florida	\$5.28B
Georgia	\$2.08B
Hawaii	\$299M

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

Prescriber Checkup
The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

Like 0

Prescriber Checkup - California

California

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

All States

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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Doctors With Most Claims

JAE YOO MD	78,923 claims
HEW QUON M.D.	76,355 claims
SANG BAIK	74,738 claims
ARMINE NAZARYAN M.D.	63,329 claims
TSOVINAR TEKKELIAN M.D.	60,515 claims

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	6,969
Internal Medicine	6,645
Psychiatry	1,749
Ophthalmology	1,666
Specialist	1,571

Top Drugs

Fill Rank	Cost Rank	Drug	Drug Cost	Claims
1	32	SIMVASTATIN Treats high cholesterol and... +	\$55,901,522	3,970,131
2	30	HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN Used to relieve moderate to... +	\$60,056,859	3,811,724
3	56	AMLODIPINE BESYLATE Amlodipine is used alone or... +	\$36,638,737	3,303,035
4	75	LISINAPRIL Treats high blood pressure ... +	\$31,803,246	3,225,239
5	33	OMEPRAZOLE Treats heartburn, stomach u... +	\$55,040,234	2,806,825
6	79	LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM Levothyroxine, a thyroid ho... +	\$30,749,452	2,734,677
7	94	METFORMIN HCL Metformin is used alone or ... +	\$25,516,926	2,366,467
8	180	FUROSEMIDE	\$11,550,584	1,966,574

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

The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D



Prescriber Checkup » California » Family Medicine

Top Family Medicine Prescribers in California

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

All States

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	Schedule Two	Schedule Three	Dangerous Drugs to Seniors	Brand Name Drugs	Prescription Price
ARMINE NAZARYAN M.D. Family Medicine Glendale CALIFORNIA 91205	63,329	\$4.66M	950 809 are 65+	0% patients receiving schedule two controlled substances Avg: 3%	8% patients receiving schedule three controlled substances Avg: 14%	2% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	46% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 23%	\$74 Average prescription price Avg: \$57
SAMVEL HMAYAKYAN M.D. Family Medicine Glendale CALIFORNIA 91204	47,994	\$2.69M	831 761 are 65+	4% patients receiving schedule two controlled substances Avg: 3%	22% patients receiving schedule three controlled substances Avg: 14%	2% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	33% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 23%	\$56 Average prescription price Avg: \$57

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 dangerous drugs to seniors:

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	Schedule Two	Schedule Three	Dangerous Drugs to Seniors	Brand Name Drugs	Prescription Price
SHERA RAISEN M.D. Family Medicine Los Angeles CALIFORNIA 90025	322	\$21.4K	25 15 are 65+	0% patients receiving schedule two controlled substances Avg: 3%	0% patients receiving schedule three controlled substances Avg: 14%	26% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	29% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 23%	\$66 Average prescription price Avg: \$57
ALLYSON BROOKS MD Family Medicine Newport Beach CALIFORNIA 92660	660	\$65.7K	131 114 are 65+	0% patients receiving schedule two controlled substances Avg: 3%	0% patients receiving schedule three controlled substances Avg: 14%	24% prescriptions for patients 65+ for potentially dangerous drugs Avg: 1%	62% prescriptions for brand name drugs Avg: 23%	\$99 Average prescription price Avg: \$57

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	36.6M	\$479M
LISINOPRIL	33.7M	\$289M
HYDROCODONE-ACETAMINOPHEN	32.9M	\$461M
LEVOTHYROXINE SODIUM	29.9M	\$283M
AMLODIPINE BESYLATE	29.9M	\$305M
OMEPRAZOLE	29.3M	\$582M
FUROSEMIDE	23.9M	\$127M
METOPROLOL TARTRATE	19.3M	\$132M
METFORMIN HCL	19.3M	\$204M
HYDROCHLOROTHIAZIDE	16.8M	\$96.2M
ATORVASTATIN CALCIUM	16M	\$1.33B
GABAPENTIN	15.7M	\$463M
WARFARIN SODIUM	15.6M	\$177M
METOPROLOL SUCCINATE	14.3M	\$617M

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

All States

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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AT A GLANCE: THIS DRUG IN 2012

7.9M Medicare Part D Claims **\$2.12B** Retail Cost

Cost by state

State	Claims	Cost
New York	756,102	\$186M
Texas	728,863	\$208M
California	520,323	\$131M
Florida	512,655	\$138M
Ohio	370,753	\$101M
North Carolina	364,356	\$95.1M
Georgia	333,987	\$82.9M
Pennsylvania	333,205	\$91.1M

Top prescribers for NEXIUM

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Provider	Medicare Claims	City	State
SANG BAIK Internal Medicine	3,949	LOS ANGELES	California
JAE YOO MD Internal Medicine	3,690	LOS ANGELES	California
JUNG BAE M.D. Internal Medicine	2,272	LOS ANGELES	California

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

Prescriber Checkup

The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D

Like 0

Prescriber Checkup » New York » NEXIUM

Top Prescribers of NEXIUM in New York

Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code

All States

For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216

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Provider	Medicare Claims	City
CHANG LEE M.D. Internal Medicine	2,048	FLUSHING
YUN HEE CHUNG MD Hematology Oncology	1,918	FLUSHING
YONG LIN M.D. Internal Medicine	1,623	NEW YORK
VALERI KAZAKOV MD Internal Medicine	1,610	BRONX
ALEKSANDR LIVSHITS M.D. Internal Medicine	1,470	BROOKLYN

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

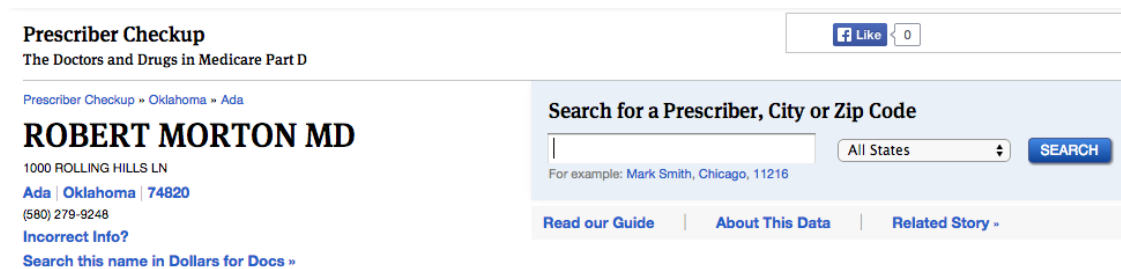
Beyond looking at individual providers, you may want to look at how prescribing differs by neighborhood. Some neighborhoods with high concentrations of foreign-born residents had higher rates of name-brand use than adjacent areas.

[You can look at name-brand prescribing rates by state here.](#)

[And you can download data by zip code here.](#)

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 17 drug companies. Take Robert Morton, an Oklahoma psychiatrist.



The screenshot shows the 'Prescriber Checkup' page for Robert Morton MD. The page title is 'Prescriber Checkup' with the subtitle 'The Doctors and Drugs in Medicare Part D'. There is a 'Like' button with a count of 0. The breadcrumb trail is 'Prescriber Checkup » Oklahoma » Ada'. The main heading is 'ROBERT MORTON MD' with the address '1000 ROLLING HILLS LN, Ada | Oklahoma | 74820' and phone number '(580) 279-9248'. There is a link for 'Incorrect Info?' and a link to 'Search this name in Dollars for Docs'. A search box is present with the text 'Search for a Prescriber, City or Zip Code' and a 'SEARCH' button. Below the search box is an example: 'For example: Mark Smith, Chicago, 11216'. There are also links for 'Read our Guide', 'About This Data', and 'Related Story'.

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.](#)