



Shortage of Vital Drugs Shows Another Free Market Failure in Health Care

August 20, 2011 by [Patrick A. Malone](#)

The U.S. faces a growing shortage of the low-profit but vital generic drugs that cancer patients and other desperate folks rely on. These drugs are made in places like India and China in plants that the Food and Drug Administration lacks power to inspect.

Meantime, Big Pharma focuses on new high-profit but low-benefit drugs. The latest examples of new FDA approvals: Provenge, a drug for prostate cancer which on average extends life by four months at a cost of \$93,000, and Yervoy, a melanoma drug with a price tag of \$120,000 for a similar average benefit of four more months of life.

As reported by [Gardiner Harris in the New York Times](#), a lot of solutions are being proposed to the crisis that has been brewing for the last few years, ranging from creation of a government stockpile of drugs to a requirement that drug makers give an early warning to the FDA of inability to keep up with demand for drugs.

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Good luck getting any of these passed by a Congress whose loudest members reflexively say the government is the problem, not the solution. But as many [Times readers noted in comments on the new article](#), this story is another example of why we need smart government, not no government, to address the many failures of the free market when it comes to vital services like health care.

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