



## Health Newsflash

### New Drugs and Indications Reviewed at the October 2005 DEC Meeting



The Drug Evaluation Committee (DEC) of ESI Canada conducts a monthly review of all new drugs receiving their Notices of Compliance from Health Canada, to ascertain their places in therapy and their possible impacts on the private payer sector. Pricing information is included when the drug is available for sale. However, availability of a drug does not immediately follow its approval by Health Canada. This issue is provided to our insurance customers as a value-added service. We hope you will find this Health Newsflash informative, timely, and useful.

#### Optimizing the Value of Drug and Dental Benefits

#### New Drugs:

**Advicor** [*Add-veh-core*] (500mg/20mg, 1000mg/20mg of nicotinic acid/lovastatin) is available from Oryx Pharmaceuticals Inc. as a combination tablet of two brand drugs, Mevacor and Niaspan used to treat high cholesterol. Patients should only use Advicor once they have been stabilized on the individual drugs. The cost of Advicor is expected to be similar to generic Mevacor (lovastatin) plus Niaspan, at approximately \$2.15 per tablet and will require only one pharmacy dispensing fee. We anticipate that this new combination will have minimal impact on private plans.

**Avastin** [*Ah-vah-stin*] (25mg/ml bevacizumab) is available as an injection into the vein from Hoffmann-La Roche Limited for treating metastatic cancer (cancer that has spread) of the colon or rectum (colorectal cancer). The dose of Avastin is 5mg/kg administered every two weeks. Serious side effects include high blood pressure, bleeding, and blood clots. The current treatment of colorectal cancer is the combination of Camptosar, leucovorin, and 5-fluorouracil (e.g., Adrucil). In 2004, there were about 8,400 cases of metastatic colorectal cancer in Canada. The average cost of Avastin per patient per year is about \$52,000, but will vary based on the weight of the patient. Avastin has been placed on the ESI Hospital Drug Program and coded as "H" in the system, therefore it will have no impact on private plans using the Program.

**Erbix** [*Err-bit-tucks*] (2mg/ml injection cetuximab) is available as an injection into the vein from ImClone Systems Incorporated for treating metastatic colorectal cancer. Severe reactions related to the injection of the drug can occur, so the patient must have appropriate medical care available when given the drug. Erbitux has been placed on the ESI Hospital Drug Program and coded as "H" in the system, therefore it will have no impact on private plans using the Program.

**Finacea** [*Fin-eye-see-ah*] (15% azelaic acid) is available as a topical gel by Berlex Canada Inc to treat rosacea, which is a chronic skin condition usually affecting the face. Rosacea affects about 5% of the population. Finacea is applied to the affected skin twice a day. The current treatments for rosacea are topical metronidazole, such as Metrogel, and sometimes oral antibiotics. Finacea has had similar results to current treatments. Finacea costs \$43.50 US (\$51 CDN) compared to Metrogel at about \$18 CDN per 30 gram tube. The actual price for Finacea is not yet available in Canada. All topical metronidazole products were 0.09% of ESI Canada's drug expenditures from August 2004 to August 2005; therefore we anticipate Finacea to have minimal impact on private drug plans.

**Inomax** [*Inn-oh-macks*] (100ppm/cylr, 800ppm/cylr nitric oxide) is available from INO Therapeutics, Inc. as an inhalation gas. Inomax dilates the vessels in the lungs resulting in increased oxygen flow. It is used with mechanical breathing devices for various lung problems in newborns and must be closely monitored as this drug can be toxic. Inomax has been placed on the ESI Hospital Drug Program and coded as "H" in the system; therefore it will have no impact on private plans using the Program.

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#### **New Indications:**

For the drugs listed below, we anticipate that their new indications will have minimal impact on employer drug plans, unless otherwise stated.

**Diovan** [*Dye-oh-van*] (40mg, 80mg, 160mg valsartan) is available as oral tablets by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. Diovan, a drug in the ARB (angiotensin receptor blocker) class, is already indicated for treating high blood pressure and can now be used for patients to decrease risk of death after a heart attack. The standard therapy in post heart attack patients is an ACE (angiotensin converting enzyme) inhibitor, such as Vasotec. ARBs are used as second line treatment for patients who cannot tolerate side effects of the ACE inhibitors. The cost of the new 40mg strength is the same as currently available strengths at about \$1.16 per tablet.

**Effexor XR** [*Ef-fecks-ore*] (37.5mg, 75mg, 100mg, 150mg venlafaxine) is available from Wyeth Canada as extended release capsules and is now indicated for use in panic disorder at doses of 37.5 to 225mg per day. This is the same dose used for depression or various anxiety disorders. Other drugs used to treat panic disorder include antidepressants such as Paxil, and anti-anxiety drugs such as Xanax. It is likely that Effexor XR is already being used for panic disorders and will be another approved drug for patients with this condition.

#### **New Generics:**

**Generic Topamax** [*Top-ah-macks*] (25, 100, 200mg topiramate) is now available as oral tablets from various generic manufacturers for treating seizure disorders. The cost for these first available generics are about 30% less than Topamax, which is between \$0.74 to \$2.21 per tablet. The anticonvulsant drugs were 1.6% of ESI Canada's drug expenditures between October 2004 and October 2005. Topamax, with the highest utilization, made up 27% of market-share in the class.

#### **Impact Statements**

##### Minimal Impact

1. The estimated cost of the new drug is similar to existing drugs and the new drug is likely to become one of a number of existing drugs used for the medical condition (shifting of market share) or,
2. The estimated cost of the new drug is similar to existing drugs and the new drug has low utilization due to either its place in therapy, its relation to other drugs or the prevalence of the medical condition

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