



Health Newsflash

New Drugs and Indications Reviewed at the June 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.

New Drugs:

Optimizing the Value of Drug and Dental Benefits

Macugen [*Mack-you-jen*] (0.3 mg/90 microliter of pegaptanib) by Pfizer Canada Inc. is available as an injection into the eye and administered every 6 weeks. Macugen is used for the "wet" type of Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD), which is a deterioration of retina leading to loss of central vision, but not to complete blindness. Currently, the only treatments for "wet" AMD are laser surgery or photodynamic surgery with Visudyne. AMD becomes more common with each decade over 50 years of age. By the age of 75, almost 15% of people have AMD. Macugen has been classified as a hospital drug and placed on the ESI Canada Hospital Drug Program until more information is known about the location where this drug will be given.

RabAvert [*Raab-ah-vur*] (2.5 unit/dose of Purified Chick Embryo Cell) is available as an injection into the muscle by Chiron Behring GmbH & Co. This new vaccine is currently the only vaccine available for active immunity against rabies. Immunisation is recommended for people working closely with animals and travelers to rabies endemic areas. Immune globulin for short term immunity and/or treatment is still available and costs an average of \$692 per treatment. Pricing of RabAvert is approximately \$172 per injection and each patient requires four injections over a 28-day period (\$688 per treatment) in order to get reliable immunity. Vaccines have varying coverage on private drug plans; however, we anticipate RabAvert to have a minimal impact.

New Indications:

Eporex [*Ee-precks*] (various dosage of epoetin alfa) is available as an injection under the skin by Janssen-Ortho Inc. This drug is used to increase red blood cell count for adults with certain diseases or conditions such as chronic renal failure (CRF), cancer, surgery and HIV. It is now indicated for pediatric patients with CRF. This disease is much more common in adults with approximately 1000 cases per million; it affects between two and six children per million. Eprex is the first drug in this class to be approved for children. The impact on overall private drug plans is anticipated to be minimal.

Enbrel [*En-brell*] (25 mg/vial of etanercept) is available as an injection under the skin by Amgen Canada Inc. Enbrel is now indicated for treating ankylosing spondylitis (AS). AS is a type of arthritis that mainly affects the spine. Approximately 0.05% to 1.8% of the population is affected by AS. Therapies of choice to reduce pain associated with this disease are exercise, NSAIDs (like Motrin), and steroids. Enbrel is the first biologic to be approved for this indication when patients do not respond to NSAIDs. The 50 mg weekly dose given for AS is the same as the new dose used for rheumatoid arthritis. Since the prevalence of AS is low, the impact on overall private drug plans is anticipated to be minimal.

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page 2



Avonex [*Ah-von-necks*] (60 micrograms/ml of interferon beta-1a) by Biogen Idec Canada Inc. is available as an injection into the muscle and given once weekly. Avonex is currently used for treating the relapsing form of multiple sclerosis (MS). It is now indicated for treating secondary progressive multiple sclerosis (SPMS), which is a more advanced/aggressive form of the disease. About 85% of MS patients will develop SPMS. Canada has a high prevalence of MS, with approximately 50,000 Canadians affected. The dose of 30 micrograms is used for treating both types of multiple sclerosis. Rebif and Betaseron are similar available treatments for SPMS. Avonex and Betaseron cost approximately \$18,000 per year compared to Rebif at \$21,000 per year Pricing information for the 60 microgram strength is unknown as of this issue.

Optimizing the Value of Drug and Dental Benefits

Tazocin [*Taz-soh-sin*] (2 g/250 mg; 3 g/375 mg; 4 g/500 mg of piperacillin and tazobactam per vial) is available as an injection into the vein by Wyeth Canada. Tazocin is an antibiotic from the penicillin family. It is currently used to treat resistant abdominal, skin, gynecological and community-acquired pneumonia infections. It has now been approved for treating hospital-acquired pneumonia. Tazocin is not limited to the hospital setting, but patients suffering from this new indication will generally be treated in hospital; therefore, the impact of this new indication on private drug plan should be minimal.

Trasylol [*Trah-sigh-lo*] (10,000 U/ml of aprotinin) is available as an injection into the vein by Bayer Inc. Trasylol is used to reduce blood loss and the need for blood transfusion in patients undergoing cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) bypass in the course of a Coronary Artery Bypass Graft (CABG) surgery. This drug is only to be used in the hospital setting and has been placed on the ESI Canada Hospital Drug Program; therefore, it will have no impact on private drug plans using this program.

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