



Health Newsflash

New Drugs and Indications Reviewed at the September 2004 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:

Alimta [All-lim-tah] 500 mg/vial of pemetrexed) is available as an infusion into the vein by Eli Lilly Canada Inc. It is a new agent for treating malignant pleural mesothelioma (cancer affecting the sac lining the chest or the abdomen). It is used with another cancer drug, cisplatin. The main side effects of this drug combination are myelosuppression (bone marrow production of fewer blood cells leading to a weakness of the immune system), fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and dyspnea (difficulty breathing). Mesothelioma occurs infrequently with a peak incidence in the U.S. occurring in 1997 with 2,300 cases. Alimta has been classified as a hospital (H) drug and placed on the ESI Canada Hospital Drug Program; therefore, it will have no impact on private drug plans using this program.

Relpax [Rel-packs] (20 and 40 mg of eletriptan) is available as oral tablets by Pfizer Canada Inc. It is another agent in the "triptan" drug class for treating adults with migraines. One tablet should be taken as soon as possible after onset of a migraine headache. We anticipate Relpax will be priced similarly to, and compete with, other triptans (e.g., Imitrex, Axert, Amerge and Zomig), therefore, it will have a minimal impact on private drug plans.

Infanrix IPV/Hib [In-fan-ricks] (pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus toxoids with inactivated poliovirus and haemophilus influenzae type B - combination vaccine) is available as an injection into the muscle by GlaxoSmithKline Inc. This new formulation combines Infanrix-IPV and Infanrix-Hib, which are marketed separately in Canada, into one vaccine with 5 common childhood vaccines. Infanrix IPV/Hib will minimize the number of injections required for children. Pricing information for Infanrix IPV/Hib is unavailable as of this issue, but will probably be comparable to Pentacel (a similar vaccine) at approximately \$190. Vaccines have varying coverages on private drug plans, however, we anticipate Infanrix IPV/Hib to have a minimal impact.

Sensipar [Sense-seh-par] (30, 60 and 90 mg of cinacalcet) is available as oral tablets by Amgen Canada Inc. It is the first of a new class of drugs, called the calcimimetics, for treating patients with high calcium and phosphorus blood levels due to chronic kidney disease. Eighty-five percent of the 20,000 dialysis patients in Canada have this complication. The starting dose of Sensipar is 30 mg once daily and it can be increased to 180 mg as necessary; corresponding to daily costs of \$11 to \$64. Other drugs on the market for treating this condition only control the symptoms. Sensipar is a major improvement as it controls the disease and helps prevent various complications of cardiac (heart), immune (body's ability to fight infection), and nervous systems. The impact to overall private drug plans is anticipated to be minimal.

Tiazac XC [Tie-ah-zack] (120, 180, 240, 300 and 360 mg of diltiazem) is available as extended release oral tablets by Biovail Pharmaceuticals Canada. It is a new formulation of diltiazem, currently available with a number of dosage forms. Tiazac XC is released over 24 hours to control hypertension (high blood pressure) throughout the day, with extra control in the morning, when blood pressure is the highest and most cardiac events occur. Hypertension has a high prevalence in the population and increases with age. Tiazac XC is priced similarly to generic diltiazem and the impact on private drug plans is anticipated to be minimal.

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Cyclessa [*Cye-kill-less-ah*] (0.1/0.025 mg + 0.125/0.025 mg + 0.15/0.025mg of desogestrel / ethinyl estradiol) is available as combined oral tablets by Organon Canada Ltd. It is a new tricyclic oral contraceptive. Oral contraceptives are widely used for birth control in women with childbearing potential. As part of the new generation of oral contraceptives, its hormone dose is lower than older drugs in this class. It provides the same efficacy with a lower incidence of side effects (weight gain, nausea, headaches or mood changes). Pricing information is currently unavailable but it is anticipated to be similar to other comparable agents, such as Alesse (\$11.70 per cycle – ON price). The impact on private drug plans is anticipated to be minimal.

Vfend [*Vee-fend*] (50 mg, 200 mg tablets and 200 mg/vial of voriconazole) is available as oral tablets and an infusion into the vein by Pfizer Canada Inc. It is a new broad spectrum antifungal (fungus infections). The infusion form is used for acute invasive aspergillosis and other invasive fungal infections, while the oral tablets are used to treat esophageal candidiasis. Dosing for esophageal candidiasis is a 200 mg tablet every 12 hours. It is comparable to Diflucan, another oral antifungal on the market. Side effects include mild and transient visual disturbances, liver function abnormalities and skin reactions. Pricing information is currently unavailable. The infusion form is used for treating seriously ill patients in hospital and has been classified as a hospital (H) drug and placed on the ESI Canada Hospital Drug Program, therefore, it will have no impact on private drug plans using this program. The oral form is anticipated to have a minimal impact.

New indications:

Trileptal [*Try-lep-tal*] (150 mg, 300 mg, 600 mg and 60 mg/ml of oxcarbazepine) is available as oral tablets and liquid by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. Trileptal was previously used for partial seizures (a form of epilepsy) either alone or as additive therapy (with another drug) for adults and as additive therapy only, in children greater than 6 years old. Its new indication is for use alone in children greater than 6 years old. It is taken orally twice a day at varying doses depending on response. About 300,000 people suffer from epilepsy in Canada and 67% of them have partial seizures. This new indication is anticipated to have a minimal impact on private drug plans.

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