



Health Newsflash

New Drugs and Indications Reviewed at the February 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 Products:

Subutex [*Sue-buu-tecks*] (0.4, 2 and 8mg of buprenorphine) is available from Schering Canada as a tablet to be placed under the tongue. It is used to treat patients addicted to drugs such as heroin and narcotics. Methadone is most commonly used for this indication and requires pharmacists to prepare and administer the treatment. In clinical trials, Subutex was shown to have similar efficacy to methadone. Revia (naltrexone) is another alternative but is not as effective as methadone or Subutex. Subutex will be prescribed by certain physicians and dispensed by specific pharmacies, similarly to methadone. The price for Subutex is currently unknown, however the overall cost of therapy may be lower as Subutex does not require preparation by the pharmacist. It is anticipated that Subutex will have minimal impact to employer plans as methadone prescriptions accounted for approximately 0.04% of all drug expenditures in 2004.

Velcade [*Vel-kade*] (3.5mg of bortezomib) is available from Janssen Ortho as an injection into the vein. Velcade is the first of a new drug class used to treat multiple myeloma (blood/bone marrow cancer) in patients who have failed at least two prior therapies. This condition is most prevalent in the elderly with an incidence of approximately 1 in 10,000 people. Velcade 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.

New indications:

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

Aldara [*Al-dare-ah*] (50mg/g of imiquimod) is available from 3M Pharmaceuticals as a topical cream applied to the skin. It has been approved to treat superficial basal cell cancer (a specific type of skin cancer). This is the most common type of skin cancer but is curable when detected and treated at an early stage. Surgical removal is the most effective and common treatment for this cancer. Aldara is applied to the cancer lesion five times per week for six weeks. Efudex is the only other topical drug approved to treat this condition. Both drugs have shown a cancer recurrence rate of approximately 20%. Aldara was previously used only for actinic keratosis (pre-cancerous thickened skin) and genital or perianal warts. The cost of each drug treatment is approximately \$30 but will vary depending on the size of the cancer lesion.

Xatral [*Zay-tra*] (10mg of alfuzosin hydrochloride) is available from Sanofi-Aventis as an oral tablet. Xatral is now indicated to be used with catheterization (insertion of tube into urinary tract to remove urine) in patients with benign prostatic hyperplasia (non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate) who are unable to urinate. Xatral is already approved to treat the symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia. Drug treatment is a temporary measure in these circumstances until patients receive surgery. The new indication may expand utilization but is anticipated to have minimal impact as Xatral accounted for only 0.03% of total drug expenditures in 2004.

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Topamax [*Top-ah-macks*] (10, 15, 25, 50, 100, and 200mg of topiramate) is available from Janssen-Ortho as oral tablets and capsules. Topamax is currently used for treating epilepsy, and is now approved to prevent migraines in adults with four or more incidences a month who fail to respond to, or are unable to take, other migraine drugs (e.g. Imitrex). Migraines affect approximately 18% of adult females and 6% of adult males. Sansert (methysergide) is the only other drug with an official indication for migraine prevention. Other drugs such as propranolol and amitriptyline, although not officially approved, are more commonly used in migraine prevention and are less expensive. Topamax costs approximately \$2 per day for migraine prevention and is anticipated to have minimal impact as it is likely already being prescribed for this indication. Topamax accounted for 0.39% of total drug expenditure in 2004.

Paxil CR [*Pack-sill-See-Are*] (12.5 and 25mg of paroxetine) is available from GlaxoSmithKline as oral tablets. Paxil CR is now approved for treating premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) – a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Paxil CR belongs to the SSRI class for treating depression, and is the first to receive this new indication in Canada. Approximately 2 to 10% of women have PMDD. SSRIs are considered first-line drug treatments. Both Prozac and Zoloft are approved in the U.S. for this indication and have the most evidence supporting their use. Paroxetine is most commonly prescribed for depression and accounted for 1.66% of total drug expenditures in 2004. We anticipate that paroxetine is already being used for PMDD and this new indication will have minimal impact to employer plans.

Nutropin [*New-trow-pin*] (5mg and 10 mg/vial of somatropin) is available from Hoffman La Roche as an injection under the skin. It is now approved for use in adults with growth hormone deficiency (GHD) syndrome. Previously, Nutropin was only indicated to treat children with growth failure due to growth hormone deficiency or who have growth failure associated with chronic renal failure. Humatrope and Saizen are other growth hormones approved in adults for this indication. The prevalence of GHD in adults is rare at approximately 0.01% (1 in 10,000). As GHD is rare in adults and other drugs already have the same indication, it is anticipated that this new indication for Nutropin will have minimal impact to employer drug plans using these drugs.

New Generics:

Novo-bupropion [*No-vo-bu-pro-pion*] (150mg of bupropion) is available from Novopharm as oral tablets. Novo-bupropion is the generic equivalent of Wellbutrin, a drug used to treat depression. Bupropion 150mg is also marketed in Canada under another brand, Zyban, which is used for smoking cessation. Although not officially indicated, it is possible that generic bupropion 150mg may also be prescribed for smoking cessation. Bupropion accounted for 0.47% of total drug expenditure in 2004. While pricing is currently unknown, generic drugs are commonly 30% less than the brand equivalent. Savings to employer drug plans can result as physicians begin to prescribe Novo-bupropion rather than Wellbutrin.

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