



Health Newsflash

New Drugs and Indications Reviewed at the May 2005 DEC Meeting



Optimizing the Value of Drug and Dental Benefits

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:

Zemplar [*Zem-plaar*] (5 mcg/ml injection, paricalcitol) is available as an injection by Abbott Laboratories Limited. Zemplar is a new drug injected into the vein for preventing and treating hyperparathyroid patients with chronic kidney failure. Hyperparathyroidism is a complication leading to low calcium levels in the body. Zemplar is similar to vitamin D and is given to patients during dialysis. Studies indicate that Zemplar may have fewer side effects compared to injectable calcitriol, a currently available drug used for the same treatment. Some studies also show that Zemplar may also have better survival rates. Zemplar has been placed on ESI Canada's Hospital Drug Program and coded as "H" in the system; therefore it will have no impact on private plans using this program.

Sativex [*Sat-the-vecks*] (27 mg/ml and 25 mg/ml, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol) is available as a buccal spray by G.W. Pharma Limited. Sativex is a new drug for treating nerve pain in adults with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). It is given as a spray inside the mouth where it is absorbed. Like other cannabis-based products, Sativex can have effects on mood, memory, etc. It may also cause changes in blood pressure and cause heart-related side effects.

About 0.16% of Canadians have MS and nerve pain affects 17-52% of these patients. Currently, therapies for treating MS nerve pain include drugs for epilepsy (e.g., Tegretol, Neurontin) and depression (e.g., Elavil). Sativex is intended to be used in addition to the above treatments when patients experience inadequate pain control.

The daily cost of Sativex is approximately \$20 compared to \$0.40-6.57 for current treatment; however, based on the limited number of patients who meet the criteria for use, this drug is expected to have minimal impact on private plans if appropriate criteria are in place for reimbursement (e.g., Prior Authorization)

Reminyl ER [*Rem-in-el*] (8mg, 16mg, 24mg, galantamine) is available as extended release oral tablets by Janssen-Ortho Inc. It is used for treating patients with mild to moderate dementia of the Alzheimer's type. Reminyl ER is taken once daily. Since the currently available form, Reminyl IR (immediate release), is given twice daily, compliance may be improved. Reminyl ER costs about the same as the IR form (\$4.59/day vs. \$4.94/day); therefore Reminyl ER will have minimal impact on private plans.

New Indications

*The impact for new indications of existing drugs is minimal, unless otherwise stated in the review.**

Risperdal, Risperdal M-Tab [*Riz-per-doll*] (0.25mg, 0.5mg, 1mg, 2mg, 3mg, 4mg, 5mg tablets, 1mg/mL oral solution, 0.5mg, 1mg, 2mg m-tabs, risperidone) by Janssen-Ortho Inc. is now indicated for treating bipolar 1 disorder. Bipolar 1 disorder consists of major depressive episodes alternating with manic episodes (periods of feeling 'high' and 'low'). Risperdal was previously used for treating schizophrenia, as well as inappropriate behaviour in severe dementia. Some other drugs already have this indication (e.g., Haldol).

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Femara [*Fem-mar-ah*] (2.5mg oral tablets, letrozole) by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. is now indicated for treating early breast cancer, as an additive therapy, in post-menopausal women who have received tamoxifen therapy. Femara was previously only indicated for treating advanced breast cancer. Arimidex is another drug that is used for treating early breast cancer in post-menopausal women. The daily cost of Femara is the same as Arimidex (\$4.95) and is another option for treating this disease.

Taxotere [*Tacks-oh-tear*] (80 mg/2ml, 20 mg/0.5 ml docetaxel) by Aventis Pharma Inc. is now indicated in combination with steroids (prednisone or prednisolone) for treating patients with metastatic prostate cancer not responding to hormone therapy. Taxotere is currently used for treating breast cancer, non-small cell lung cancer, and cancer of the head and neck.

Topamax [*Toe-pah-macks*] (15mg, 25mg, 50mg oral capsules, 25mg, 50mg, 100mg, 200mg, 300mg, 400mg oral tablets, topiramate) by Janssen-Ortho Inc. is now indicated as single therapy for treating newly diagnosed epilepsy patients greater than six years old. It is already indicated as add-on therapy for these patients greater than two years old who are not satisfactorily controlled with conventional therapy.

**Impact Statements*

No Impact

1. New drug classified as a hospital drug or a diagnostic which has no impact in the private sector.

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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