

RxCONNECTOR

A publication of the North Dakota Insurance Department

POOLMAN TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

~ *Provides information about aggressive sales practices* ~

North Dakota Insurance Commissioner Jim Poolman recently testified before the United States House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, providing information about aggressive sales practices specific to the marketing of Medicare Advantage plans in North Dakota.

"Over the course of the past several months, my office has fielded hundreds of complaints from seniors in North Dakota about Medicare Advantage plans and the abusive and aggressive sales tactics that many companies are using to

sell to vulnerable seniors," Poolman said. He added, "Today, I told their story to Congress and I am pleased that Congress is taking action and looking into these marketing abuses."

The Insurance Department has communicated many of the marketing issues to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) but so far, CMS has not provided substantive assistance.

Poolman said, "Clearly these companies need more rigorous oversight and CMS is not prepared or seemingly able to do the job. Under the current circumstances, seniors in North Dakota are being shortchanged by CMS and the

Continued on next page.

Welcome to the RxConnector newsletter!



Jim Poolman
Insurance Commissioner

Dear Friends,

This newsletter is designed to keep you up to date about the Prescription Connection for ND program and to keep you in the know about the various prescription assistance programs that are available. In addition, from time to time, we may also include other items of interest related to Medicare and the Senior Health Insurance Counseling (SHIC) program.

As always, thank you so much for all that you do for the Prescription Connection program! Without your help, our work would be that much harder. Your efforts are valued and appreciated!

If you have items of interest that you think should be included in this newsletter, we would love to hear about them! Please contact Sharon St. Aubin by email at sstaubin@nd.gov or call her toll free at 888.575.6611.

Jim Poolman
Insurance Commissioner

**Contact the
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a program of the
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**Prescription
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for North Dakota

Medicare Modernization Act."

The Insurance Department has been monitoring complaints about Medicare Advantage plans and is currently conducting an investigation into specific insurance companies, agencies and agents who are selling the plans.

Poolman said, "Our investigation is ongoing and even though we do not have regulatory authority over the insurance companies themselves, we

do have authority over the agents that are selling the plans," Poolman explained. "We will not hesitate to suspend or revoke agents' licenses."

Any senior who thinks they may have been the victim of abusive sales practices, or has been switched to a Medicare Advantage plan without knowledge or full consent or has questions about Medicare Advantage plans should call the Senior Health Insurance Counseling (SHIC) program at 1.888.575.6611.

NEW PROGRAMS ON RxASSIST

Four more pharmaceutical companies have added prescription assistance programs on RxAssist. These four are Cytogen Corporation, Ferndale Laboratories, Inc, Genzyme, and Glenwood and Western Medical.

The Cytogen Corporation has added ProstaScint and Quad-

rament (injection). Ferndale Laboratories, Inc offers many creams, lotions and ointments including Analpram, Locoid and Parmosone. Genzyme offers the Renagel Medicare Part D Assistance Program. The Glenwood and Western Medical Compassionate Drug Program offers Potaba capsules, envules, and tablets.

NeedyMeds.com provides the application forms and instructions needed when applying for these medications.

ND HEALTH ALERT NETWORK

~Current information about health emergencies available ~

The NDHAN serves as a communication network among state and local public health agencies, healthcare providers, hospitals and emergency management officials. Established through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the NDHAN is part of the North Dakota Department of Health's Emergency Preparedness and

Response program.

The information provided on this website is based upon recommendations from the CDC and other health organizations. Please check often for the most up-to-date information. To find these health alerts, use the website address <http://www.ndhan.gov/>

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

The Johnson and Johnson form asks for the NPI number. NPI stands for the National Provider ID. This number is replacing the individual provider numbers which each pro-

vider has for insurance companies. Currently, the provider's number for one insurance company is not the same for another insurance company. The NPI number will stay with

a provider regardless of where (s)he is practicing medicine and will be consistent with all insurance companies.

BLACK BOX WARNINGS FOR TWO DIABETES MEDICATIONS

The FDA has requested a black box warning for the labels of the type 2 diabetes medications Avandia, manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline and Actos, manufactured by Takeda Pharmaceuticals. These warnings came about because of increased risk for congestive heart failure associated with the medications, agency Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach announced on Wednesday at a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing, the *New York Times* reports. The FDA issued the request on May 23, according to von Eschenbach. FDA previously had not made the request public (Harris, *New York Times*, 6/7).

The FDA last month issued a public safety warning about Avandia in response to a study published on the *New England Journal of Medicine* Web site. For the study, Steven Nissen and Kathy Wolski of the Cleveland Clinic analyzed the results of 42 previous studies of Avandia that involved 27,843 participants.

GSK, Takeda Response

GSK spokesperson Nancy Pekarek said that the company is "in discussions with the FDA about

label changes" for Avandia but has "not agreed to any wording" (Newark *Star-Ledger*, 6/7).

Moncef Slaoui, chair of research and development at GSK, said, "The most important message today for the committee and the public is this: The cardiovascular profile of Avandia is comparable to that of the two other oral anti-diabetes medicines that are most widely used" in the U.S. (Lopes, *Washington Times*, 6/7).

According to Slaoui, GSK has conducted 116 trials of Avandia that have involved more than 52,000 patients (Vollmer, *Raleigh News & Observer*, 6/7).

Takeda officials in a statement said that the company has entered discussions with FDA to develop a black box warning for the label of Actos to "heighten awareness of the risk" for heart failure. However, Takeda officials said that they support the "safety and efficacy of Actos when used according to its label," adding that trials have found no increased risk for heart attacks associated with the medication (Newark *Star-Ledger*, 6/7).

PFIZER ENROLLMENT GLITCHES

Pfizer has recently returned applications from new applicants with denial letters which is causing a delay in program enrollment. There are questions on Pfizer's application that are specific to Medicare and Medicare Part D. In order to avoid delays, applicants should mark "NO" to both questions if both are inapplicable. If the applicant leaves the Part D question blank, the application will be rejected.

HEALTH ALERTS

CDC Update 00262

(5/29/2007)

Corrected: Investigation of U.S. Traveler with Extensively Drug Resistant Tuberculosis (XDR TB)

<http://www.ndhan.gov/>

CDC Health Advisory 00260

(5/28/2007)

Serious Eye Infections Associated with Soft Contact Lens Solution

<http://www.ndhan.gov/>