

New drugs

- Agriflu (influenza A and B (seasonal flu) vaccine)
 - Berinert (C1 inhibitor (human))
 - Budesonide inhaled (first-time generic for Pulmicort)
 - Cervarix (human papillomavirus vaccine (recombinant))
 - Influenza A H1N1 2009 Vaccine (GSK) (influenza A H1N1 2009 (swine flu) vaccine)
 - Ketorolac ophthalmic (first-time generic for Acular)
 - Lansoprazole (first-time generic for Prevacid)
 - Valacyclovir (first-time generic for Valtrex)
 - Vibativ (telavancin)
 - Votrient (pazopanib)
 - Zenpep (pancrelipase)
- (ePOCRATES)

Estate recovery eliminated MSPs

States will now be prohibited from recovering Medicaid expenditures for Medicare premiums and cost-sharing paid on or after Jan. 1, 2010 under Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) from the estates of deceased Medicaid/MSP recipients. To understand this more clearly, let's decipher the provision with a fabricated example:

Years ago, Ms. A applied for Medicaid. In her application, her million-dollar house did not count as an asset (the state would not make Ms. A sell her house to qualify for Medicaid). She uses Medicaid for 10 years and it costs the state around \$50,000 a year.

That's about \$500,000. She then passes away.

After her death, the state could require that her children sell her house and pay back the \$500,000. They disregarded the house for Ms. A's application, but they do not protect the children's ability to inherit.

Starting in 2010, the state may continue this "pay

back" practice for Medicaid, but not for MSPs.

(Medicare Counselor)



North Dakota
INSURANCE
DEPARTMENT
PROTECTING THE PUBLIC GOOD
PRESCRIPTION CONNECTION

■ Dear friends,

This newsletter is designed to keep you up-to-date about the Prescription Connection for North Dakota program and to keep you in the know about the various prescription assistance programs that are available. From time to time, we may also include other items of interest related to Medicare and the State 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 at sstaubin@nd.gov or call her at 1.888.575.6611.



Adam Hamm
Insurance Commissioner

Co-pay Assistance Program by Xubex

The Co-pay Assistance Program can assist patients across the country with traditional health insurance plans (not including Medicare, Medicaid or other federal funding health plans) to reduce or eliminate their usual prescription co-pay. The plan is simple to use and requires minimal paper work.

There are more than 70 different medications that are covered on the Co-pay Assistance Program plan and best of all everyone qualifies as long as they are covered through a traditional or employer-sponsored health plan.

Here is how it works:

1. Clients lookup the medication covered on the Xubex plan
2. Clients print an application, complete and mail or fax with their prescription
3. The co-pay is eliminated or reduced by the amount indicated

Newsletter about Medicare

Go to the following site to get easy to read information about Medicare. You can sign up for the newsletter.

If you require any further information, contact Xubex at 407-671-8070 or go to <http://www.Xubex.com/>.

Note: Xubex® participates in all plans nationwide—Medco, Express Script, Caremark, RxAmerica and many more. Xubex® copay assistance program bills the primary health insurance and the copay will be electronically sent to the assistance plan sponsor and will be reduced by the amount set by the manufacturer. There are no extra fees or charges for this program. The Xubex program helps facilitate these offers provided by the pharmaceutical manufacturers. The application process is simple and easy to use.

Xubex has a pharmacy and will be shipping your prescriptions from their pharmacy if you use this plan.

(Mehrddad Hariri, R.Ph.)

http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MyHealthMyMedicare/Downloads/AskMedicare_Jan2010.pdf

What happens when you apply for Extra Help

Starting in 2010, when you apply for Extra Help, your application will also be forwarded to your state to determine Medicare Savings Program (MSP) eligibility as long as you opt-in. This is due to a change in procedure:

Before 2010:

1. You fill out and submit your Extra Help application online or on paper.
2. Social Security processes (adjudicated) your application and decides if you are eligible or not. They do not have a mandated time period to review applications. It typically takes 4-6 weeks for a decision to be made.
3. If accepted, Social Security will transfer the acceptance information to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).
4. CMS will inform the Part D plan of the acceptance so that the cost-sharing of prescriptions can be adjusted to the Extra Help levels.

Starting in 2010:

1. You fill out and submit your Extra Help application.
2. Social Security processes (adjudicates) your application and decides if you are eligible or not.
3. If you opt in, your data will be sent with the daily batch of Extra Help applications to the State. Regardless of whether yours and others were eligible for LIS, the information is sent as long as you “opt in” (explanation below).

The Medicare counselor

From this point, different state Medicaid offices will use your information in different ways. Some states will grant you an MSP if you are eligible. Other states will follow-up with you, asking for more documentation before they make an MSP determination. In New York, the New York State Department of Health reviews and enrolls clients with uncomplicated cases into the MSP and sends a notice to call the county (local Medicaid

offices) if they have any questions. Complex cases are routed to local Departments of Social Services and counties for follow-up.

Important notes about the Extra Help application

The take-home point from all of this: Starting in 2010, when you apply for Extra Help, you will also indirectly submit an application for an MSP as long as you don't “opt out.” To avoid “opting out,” you must note a question similar to the following:

When you leave it blank, you elect to send your information to the state—and it's possible that you'll reap invaluable benefits in return. Another important issue lies early in the Extra Help application. You will find a question regarding assets on the first page. It will look much like this:

Information about Medicare Savings Programs: You may be able to get help from your state with your Medicare costs under the Medicare Savings Programs. To start your application process for the Medicare Savings Programs, Social Security will send information from this form to your state unless you tell us not to. If you want to get help from the Medicare Savings Programs, do not complete this question. Just sign and date the application and your state will contact you. If you are not interested in filing for the Medicare Savings Programs, place an X in the box below.

NOT INTERESTED, do not send information to the state

If you are married and living with your spouse, do you have savings, investments or real estate worth more than \$25,010? If you are not married or you do not live with your spouse, is the value more than \$12,510? Do NOT count the home you live in, vehicles, personal possessions, burial plots, irrevocable burial contracts or back payments from Social Security and SSI.

YES If you place an X in the YES box, you are not eligible for the extra help. But, your

continued ...

state may be able to help you with your Medicare costs through their Medicare Savings Programs. To start the application process for Medicare Savings Programs, skip to page 6, sign this application and return it to us. If you are not interested in Medicare Savings Programs, skip to question 15.

[] NO or NOT SURE If you place an X in the NO or NOT SURE box, complete the rest of this application and return it to us.

This question is problematic. If you check YES, the application instructs you to STOP and skip the proceeding questions, since you do not qualify for Extra Help. However, you may still qualify for a Medicare Savings Program. If you stop filling out the application, your state Medicaid agency will get a one-page application with your name, your social security

number, and a checked YES box—with no income levels. How can they determine your MSP eligibility with incomplete information? They can't. So: Fill out the ENTIRE application, even if it tells you to skip ahead.

To summarize, leave the “NOT INTERESTED” box unchecked and complete the ENTIRE application.

At first glance, “[sending] information to the state” may look like “[sending] your information to receive endless bothersome mailings from the state.” Some may not realize the true value of Medicare Savings Programs. Leave the check-box blank.

(Medicare Counselor)

FDA adds heart attack warning to Meridia diet pill

Federal health regulators are warning doctors that weight loss pill Meridia can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients with a history of heart problems. The Food and Drug Administration is adding new labeling to the drug, stressing that it should not be used in patients with heart failure, hypertension, irregular heart beats and other problems.

The company has previously stressed that the drug is only approved for patients with no previous history of heart disease.

Meridia is marketed by North Chicago-based Abbott Laboratories. The company has previously stressed that the drug is only approved for patients with no previous history of heart disease.

FDA approved Meridia in 1997 as a weight loss aid alongside diet and exercise. The drug is related to the amphetamine family of stimulants.

(Yellow Brix, Inc.)

Medicine at work

The Atlanta Journal Constitution reports on Medicine at Work, “a service offered by Houston-based NuPhysicia” that uses two-way video at a workplace “that lets patients consult in real-time with a Georgia-licensed physician, who can be hundreds of miles away.

Using special equipment called the T-Cart—or telemedicine cart—a doctor and an on-site paramedic can listen to the patient’s heartbeat and take other vital signs or use a special scope that allows the physician to examine the

patient’s ears, throat, nose and eyes. The doctor can send a prescription to the clinic; the paramedic prints it out and hands it to the patient” (Poole, 1/28).

(Atlanta Journal Constitution)

Bismarck Assistive Technology event planned

Bismarck will host a free assistive technology workshop from 6-9 p.m. Monday, March 8, at the University of Mary Benedictine Center.

The event is appropriate for the general public including individuals with disabilities, parents, educators, service providers and advocates. Assistive technology can open doors and break

down barriers for children and adults with disabilities.

Pre-registration is requested by calling 888-258-7949, or e-mailing joyce@thearcofbismarck.org.

(AARP ND News)

Tax-Aide sites open in 11 N.D. cities

Beginning Monday, Feb. 1, AARP Tax-Aide sites in North Dakota are open. Tax-Aide is the nation's largest, free, volunteer-run tax preparation service, where volunteers commit their time and talents to help their neighbors.

This service is available to middle- and low income taxpayers of all ages with special attention to those 60 and older.

IRS-certified volunteer preparers are trained to assist in filing accurate returns and help taxpayers receive all of the benefits, credits and deductions to which they are entitled. Most AARP Tax-Aide sites e-file returns, also at no cost, which helps taxpayers get refunds quickly.

Every taxpayer's return is quality reviewed and all information is kept confidential.

AARP Tax-Aide sites are open through the April 15 tax deadline.

For more information call toll-free 888-227-7669 or visit www.aarp.org/taxaide.

People interested in becoming a Tax-Aide volunteer can apply on the AARP website.

(AARP ND News)



Warning: Counterfeit Alli

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is warning the public about a counterfeit version of the weight-loss drug Alli 60 mg capsules (120 count refill pack) being sold over the Internet, particularly at online auction sites.

The counterfeit product is illegal and unsafe. FDA advises people who believe that they have a counterfeit product not to use the drug and to dispose of it immediately. There is no evidence at this time that the counterfeit Alli product has been sold in retail stores.

(FDA)



Authentic alli Sample

Counterfeit alli Sample

Poisons in the kitchen cabinet

Vanilla extract contains ethanol, the same type of alcohol found in beer, wine, and hard liquor. The amount of extract called for in recipes would not be dangerous. But a child who swallowed the contents of a bottle might be at risk of alcohol poisoning. Keep flavoring extracts out of reach, along with other alcohol-containing liquids.

The poppy seeds we bake with or eat on bagels could, in fact, cause a positive drug screen for opiates. When people eat poppy seeds, a drug test could be positive for morphine or codeine, which are metabolites (break-down products) of heroin. BUT – this generally happens only if people eat a lot of poppy seeds—more than one poppy seed bagel, for example, a short time before the test. Drinking poppy seed tea has actually caused poisoning and is NOT recommended!

Nutmeg tastes great in cookies and eggnog, but too much can cause hallucinations. Keep nutmeg, and its relative, mace, out of the reach of children.

Drug is on back order

According to Forest Laboratories, the manufacturer of Armour Thyroid, there is a critical back-order situation. The company is unaware, at the time of this writing, of when the product will be available. And, as would be expected, it recommends that patients contact their physician for substitute treatment until restocking occurs. You can check on the status of the drug by calling (866) 927-3260.

Armour Thyroid is a natural porcine-derived preparation for thyroid hormone replacement that does not contain gluten or lactose. It contains two thyroid hormones T3 and T4. Synthroid is a synthetic T4 hormone reported to be identical to that produced in the human thyroid gland.

Many people are able to take the product without experiencing negative side effects.

Oil of wintergreen is another name for methyl salicylate, a relative of aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid.) Small amounts are safe to use as flavoring agents, but the bottle

MUST be locked up, where children can't get to it. Small amounts of oil of wintergreen, like small amounts of aspirin, can poison children. Because oil of wintergreen is rapidly absorbed, children can become dangerously ill very quickly.

(ePOCRATES)

As with any drug, precautions must be taken, and adverse reactions are possible. With hormone supplements, the most common side effects are those related to taking too much. Common reactions include nervousness, anxiety, insomnia, muscle weakness, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, irritability and a great deal more. There is potential for interaction with other drugs taken, food and specific medical conditions a person might have. This, as well as all medication, should be monitored carefully by a physician.

Perhaps your physician can alter the Synthoid dosage to find a level that you can tolerate until your Armour product becomes available.

(Bismarck Tribune)



Pfizer pares, refocuses research after Wyeth buy

Drugmaker Pfizer Inc., which just bought rival Wyeth in October, said it will scrap testing of roughly 100 experimental drugs from their combined research operations to focus more resources on its priority areas.

New York-based Pfizer said it will continue with about 500 research projects. About 70 percent of those - and 75 percent of its late-stage research - fall within what it calls "Invest to Win" areas because of the great need for better treatments. They are Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and metabolic disorders, pain, cancer, inflammatory disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis, and mental illnesses including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

As part of the integration, Pfizer will reduce the square footage of its R&D facilities by one-third, eliminating six research sites and an unspecified number of workers.

Of the 500 drugs, 133 are in human testing, including 34 in final-stage studies, and six await approval in various countries - up from 100 in human testing last March. Some are vaccines or biologic drugs produced in living cells, both new priority areas for Pfizer, along with diabetes and mental illness.

"I think more important than the numbers are really the quality and breadth of the projects," said Martin Mackay, who heads research on pills and other traditional drugs.

"I think the hottest years for us will be 2011, 2012," when new products could start coming on the market, he said.

This year, a new version of the blockbuster children's vaccine Prevnar is expected to be approved in the U.S. It protects against double the number of bacteria strains that cause ear infections and meningitis as the original version. The company plans to submit data late in the year seeking approval to market the vaccine for adults.

Pfizer, the world's biggest drugmaker by revenue, expects to report key study data sometime this year on experimental medicines including Alzheimer's disease drug Dimebon and the biologic drug tanezumab for arthritis and other chronic pain, and later seek approval of them.

"We have a whole range of infectious disease (drugs) and preventive vaccines" in testing, including one to prevent hospital patients from getting dangerous staph infections, said Mikael Dolsten, head of biologic research.

Pfizer now has six vaccines and 27 biologic drugs in development, up from had only one vaccine and 16 biologic drugs before it bought Wyeth for \$68 billion, partly for its expertise in vaccines and biotech drugs. Pfizer now is aiming to become a top-tier maker of those medicines by 2015.

When the two companies combined their research programs, they had a 3 to 1 ratio of traditional, chemically synthesized pills versus vaccines and biologic drugs in early, laboratory testing. After the early research portfolio was pruned and refocused, the ratio swung to 1.3 to 1, Mackay noted.

Biologic drugs generally are more powerful and pricey than pills, and so far have not faced generic competition in the U.S.

The 500-drug research portfolio includes 30 drugs in testing for cancer, 10 for Alzheimer's disease, eight for pain, 11 for inflammation, six for diabetes and metabolic disorders, and eight for schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or other mental illnesses. Those are all in human testing, and many others are being studied in animals or in test tubes.

Pfizer, which makes the world's top-selling drug, cholesterol fighter Lipitor, continues to do some research in allergy and respiratory disorders, eye diseases, gastrointestinal conditions and genitourinary problems such as endometriosis. (*YellowBrix Inc.*)

FDA clears Acorda drug for multiple sclerosis

Federal health regulators have approved an Acorda Therapeutics pill to improve walking in patients multiple sclerosis, an often disabling disease that affects the nervous system.

The Food and Drug Administration said Ampyra is the first drug approved to help multiple sclerosis patients walk.

About 400,000 patients in the U.S. have the disease, which affects the brain and nervous system, causing loss of balance, muscle spasms and other movement problems.

Between 260,000 and 340,000 of those patients have difficulty walking, and could be eligible for the new drug, according to company officials. Acorda, based in Hawthorne, N.Y., conducted two trials tracking patients' ability to complete a 25-foot walking exercise. Both studies showed improvements in time needed to complete the exercise. While those gains were often just a fraction of a second, Acorda CEO Ron Cohen said that on average, patients' times improved by 25 percent after taking Ampyra.

Cohen said the company will launch Ampyra in the U.S. in March. He added that the pill could be combined with older medications designed to

slow the progression of multiple sclerosis.

Ampyra will be manufactured under a license with Irish drugmaker Elan Corp., which developed the extended-release formulation for the pill. Acorda will market and distribute the drug in the U.S.

Company shares jumped \$2.50, or 9.8 percent, to close at \$28.12 Friday, adding 13 cents in after-hours trading.

In its announcement posted online, the FDA warned that Ampyra can cause seizures when given at higher-than-recommended doses—anything over 10 mg. Company studies showed that doses above 10 mg increased seizure risk but did not increase the drug's effectiveness.

The FDA said the drug should also not be given to patients with moderate to severe kidney disease, as they are at greater risk of seizures. Other side effects reported in clinical trials included: insomnia, urinary tract infections, dizziness, headache, nausea and throat pain, according to the FDA.

(YellowBrix, Inc.)

“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.”

- Albert Einstein

Pfizer MAINTAIN Program

The Pfizer MAINTAIN Program (Medicines Assistance for Those who Are In Need) provides free Pfizer medicines to qualified patients, delivered right to their home. This program can help eligible patients who have recently become unemployed and are uninsured continue receiving their Pfizer medicines.

Applications for enrollment into the Pfizer MAINTAIN Program will be accepted through December 31, 2010. Program participants will receive their Pfizer medicines for free for up to one year, or until they become insured again, whichever comes first.

Can unemployed people in need of Wyeth medicines get help?

As a result of Pfizer and Wyeth coming together, Pfizer is extending the benefits of the MAINTAIN program to people who need help staying on their Wyeth medicines if they are unemployed and uninsured. For more information or to apply, please call 1-800-568-9938.

What Pfizer medicines are available?

With the Pfizer MAINTAIN Program, qualified patients can get many branded Pfizer primary care medicines for free.

People who need Pfizer's specialty and oncology medicines can find out if they qualify for help through Pfizer's other patient assistance programs by calling 1-866-706-2400.

Who is eligible for the Pfizer MAINTAIN Program?

Individuals and their immediate family members are eligible for this program if:

- They have become unemployed since Jan. 1, 2009
- They were prescribed and have been taking a Pfizer medicine for at least 3 months prior to becoming unemployed and enrolling in the program
- They have no prescription coverage
- They can attest to their financial hardship

Where would I get my medicine?

Enrolled patients will receive a 90-day supply of medicine, sent directly to their home, and will continue to do so for up to one year, or until they become insured, whichever comes first. Refills are available during the 1-year enrollment period. Patients can call 1-866-578-4995 to order their refills.

How do I apply?

To apply for the Pfizer MAINTAIN Program, please:

- Download an application or request it by calling 1-866-706-2400
- Complete the easy, 1-page application. Mail the completed application and proof of unemployment to the Pfizer MAINTAIN Program

The application will be processed in 2 to 3 weeks. If approved, your medicine will be sent directly to your home.