

Health And Well-Being

Finding Help With Expensive Medications

by Jeffrey Lewis

(NAPS)—If you or someone you love is one of the millions of Americans with a chronic disease or a life-threatening condition, pharmaceutical manufacturers and their partners offer you a gift of hope this holiday season.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers are criticized as Scrooge or the Grinch in our country's health care system. Elected officials and advocacy organizations want to blame somebody for rising Rx costs, and the most obvious target is the Big Pharma.

But in this blame game, very little attention is given to the help the pharmaceutical industry and its partners quietly provide to patients in need through a variety of programs.

Such programs are often based on the patient's household income, but not always. Patients with no health insurance coverage are often the first group considered eligible. Likewise, those with one or more chronic or life-threatening conditions are a high priority.

If you fall into one of these categories, check out the Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) found on individual pharmaceutical company websites or

through Partnership for Prescription Assistance (www.pparx.org), the website created by PhRMA, the trade association representing pharmaceutical manufacturers, linking patients to more than 475 different assistance programs.

On most of these websites, you can be connected with a customer support team member who can help determine if you are eligible and get you enrolled. You will be asked to verify that you are insured or uninsured and, in some cases, provide proof of income. You may need your physician to validate your condition. But once approved, access to medication is almost immediate.

(Note: Patients enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid may not be eligible.)

Pharmaceutical manufacturers also offer co-pay assistance, in which the patient is offered help with the cost of medication co-payments. Some co-pay assistance programs do not limit who is eligible. And, it is important to know that some co-pay assistance programs will not help people on Medicare. Each program sets its own rules.

People searching for an online provider should check out www.RxAssist.org. This site was developed by Astra-

Zeneca, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, with the sole purpose of helping people access needed medications. It is one of the best sites available.

The California Chronic Care Coalition (CCCC) launched the website www.mypatientrights.com in California and is taking it nationwide to help people who have been denied treatment or medicines, experienced delays or are dissatisfied with the decisions made by their health plan. Today, this program is operating in 17 states. It helps patients get the care or treatment they need if denied, or if their plans don't cover their meds and force them to pay full price. The program is available in 17 states—check the website to see if your state has a program.

This holiday season, if you need help with your medications, you are not alone. Go to the websites cited throughout this article. They can help connect you with low-cost and free alternatives. It is worth your time to explore these options. Feel free to e-mail me with your questions.

Jeffrey Lewis, CEO of Legacy Health Endowment in Turlock, can be reached at jeffrey@legacyhealthendowment.org. The views expressed are his own.