

ISSUES IN HEALTH CARE

Generic Drug Watch: It “Pays” To Stay Tuned In

(NAPSA)—If you’re concerned about healthcare costs, you should keep an eye on what’s happening with generic drugs. It is estimated that dozens of widely used brand-name prescription drugs are scheduled to go off patent in the next four to five years, representing \$35-40 billion in annual sales. This means that bioequivalent versions of these drugs will be available for the first time—at costs typically 35 percent, and as much as 80 percent, less than brand versions. These include drugs you probably use, or have seen advertised on television, such as Claritin, Prozac and Zoloft. Even the patent for Prilosec, the world’s best-selling drug, is set to expire this year.

However, there is a danger that some brand drug manufacturers, in an attempt to protect their market exclusivity, are engaging in a variety of unfair behaviors to block competition. One popular action is filing new patents at the last minute, which is intended to extend their market exclusivity and timed to ensure that consumers pay brand-name prices for years after generics were supposed to be available.

If introduced in a timely manner, generic equivalents would save American consumers billions of dollars. And if reforms that widen access to generic versions of drugs like these are not made

soon, access to affordable, quality healthcare for all Americans could be severely threatened.

Business and consumers should have a strong interest in helping ensure that generic equivalents are made available as soon as legally possible. One way to do this is by contacting your congressional representative and asking him or her to support reforms and legislation such as the McCain-Schumer bill, which will help widen access to


generics and ensure that consumers can benefit from their savings as soon as possible.

Following is a brief list of some of the most popular drugs that could soon have lower-cost generic versions available. Generic versions for some of these drugs have already been delayed and any further delay is seen as an infringement of your rights, and, as the projected savings indicate, an assault on your budget.

Brand Drug	Use	Year of Patent Expiration	Average Branded Prescription Drug Cost	Potential Generic Prescription Drug Cost*
Prilosec	Acid reflux	2001	\$114.25	\$ 74.26
Axid	Ulcers and heartburn	2002	\$ 8.89	\$ 5.78
Claritin Tablets	Seasonal allergies	2002	\$201.58	\$131.03
Flovent	Asthma	2002	\$102.23	\$ 66.45
Ortho-Novum	Oral contraceptive	2003	\$ 80.90	\$ 52.06
Prozac	Depression	2001 or 2003	\$249.99	\$162.49

*Generic costs based on estimated 35 percent savings

Consumer Prices Source: CVS.com



Some of the most popular prescription drugs may soon have lower cost generic versions available.