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# Pharmacy Benefit News

From Pro Pharma

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## EFFICACY QUESTIONS

Recent reports question the benefits of several commonly used drugs. The following three summaries illustrate these reports, but are not meant to be an in-depth review of pros and cons.

### ANTIDEPRESSANTS OF LITTLE USE?

A review of unpublished studies submitted to the FDA by drugmakers found many of the meds have little or no effect on patients, according to a new review of the previously unknown results, which was published in the new England Journal of Medicine. The upshot is that docs and patients may be getting a distorted view of the effectiveness of such drugs as Effexor, Zocor, Cymbalta and Paxil.

The researchers looked at reviews from the FDA for trials between 1987 and 2004 on 12 widely used antidepressants involving 12,564 patients, and whether the research was published. Those studies that were published were then compared against FDA versions. They found that the results determined whether and how studies were published. Most of the studies that were not positive were not published or they were published with a positive spin, such as emphasizing positive secondary outcomes when a primary outcome proved negative. While drugmakers don't have to publish all their studies, the researchers identified unpublished studies by comparing databases of medical journals with documents filed with the FDA.

### WHO NEEDS CHOLESTEROL PILLS – VERY FEW?

The fine print in a Lipitor ad cites the following: In a large clinical study lasting more than three years, 3 percent of patients taking a placebo had a heart attack, compared with 2 percent on the Pfizer pill. This means for every 100 people, three people on placebos and two people on Lipitor had heart attacks. One

## VYTORIN NO BETTER THAN GENERIC ZOCOR?

A lawsuit seeking class-action certification was filed against Merck and Schering-Plough in federal court in Seattle, alleging the drugmakers violated state consumer protection laws arising from the sale and marketing of Zetia and Vytorin. The suit claims the companies have known since 2006 that the combination of drugs - Vytorin includes Zetia and Zocor - was no more effective than the generic version of Zocor in blocking the fatty arterial plaques that can cause heart attack and stroke, as the drugmakers led consumers to believe. Both the American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association issued statements asking patients to talk to their doctors before changing therapy.

**COMMENT:** It is interesting that these are all being reported in the media before they have been independently confirmed. Question your health plans and vendors as to what they are doing in their Pharmacy & therapeutics Committees to objectively evaluate these issues.

## DRUGS THAT LOST PATENT PROTECTION

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BRAND NAME	GENERIC NAME	INDICATION
COVERA-HS	verapamil hydrochloride	calcium-channel blocker
METROGEL-VAGINAL	metronidazole	bacterial vaginitis

**NOTE:** Both Wyeth (the brand manufacturer) and Teva (the generic manufacturer) are making generic Protinix. Check your formularies to ensure that your members can take advantage of generic copays.

## JCODE x NDC BRIDGE

The Pro Pharma quarterly update for the JCode product is

fewer heart attack per 100 people. So to spare one person a heart attack, 100 people had to take Lipitor for more than three years. The other 99 got no measurable benefit.

“What if you put 250 people in a room and told them they would each pay \$1,000 a year for a drug they would have to take every day, that many would get diarrhea and muscle pain, and that 249 would have no benefit? And that they could do just as well by exercising?” asks Jerome Hoffman, professor of clinical medicine at the University of California at Los Angeles. “How many would take that?”

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being readied to send to our clients. *Please note that the January update each year is the most comprehensive, and encompasses numerous changes and modifications.* It removes the "hassle factor" from pricing and paying claims. The list now contains ASP, Part B HCPCS codes and updated AWP, WAC and complete search capability on all fields. You can also get NDCs grouped by category to project costs for treating various diseases. Pro Pharma clients report savings of over 40% over claims paid on a billed basis, and have decreased adjuster and/or examiner time and hassle. Pick your format from paper, Excel, text for legacy systems, or web based.

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