

## **Step therapy bill protects consumers**

Step therapy applies to a small percentage of the prescriptions written by doctors as opposed to a “wide range of New Yorkers.” And when there are disputes about what treatment is appropriate for a given patient, there are exception procedures that can and do override the step therapy policy. Another fact: in the vast majority of step therapy cases, patients have absolutely no problems with the substituted drug.

These policies can help protect patients from being saddled with higher co-payments and out-of-pocket costs for their prescriptions. Advocates acknowledge that the cost of drugs is an issue, particularly for those with chronic diseases requiring ongoing medication therapies, citing a new survey by the National MS Society that found one of the chief obstacles to access drugs is costs. An investigation by doctors at the University of Michigan and Ohio State University and reported in the May 9, 2016 Journal of the American Medical Association found Americans spent an extra \$73 billion between 2010 and 2012 on pricier brand-name drugs because physicians don't recommend equally effective generics. And consumers paid nearly one-third of those additional costs through out-of-pocket payments. Moreover, the report found that therapeutic substitution “offers the potential to decrease expenditure and potentially improve the efficiency of the health care system.”

Supporters of the Step Therapy Reform bill (S.3419-B/A.2834-B) would have us believe that doctors' prescribing decisions are always based on what is therapeutically best for each individual patient. However, the truth is prescribing decisions are often influenced by pharmaceutical manufacturers' incentives that frequently result in patients being prescribed new drugs over equally effective generics. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Open Payments Data shows from 2013 through 2015, more than 52,000 doctors in New York received nearly \$290 million from various pharmaceutical companies for consulting and payments associated to research. This raises legitimate concern that the best interest of the patient may too often be subject to which drugs a doctor is being paid to promote. Step therapy programs help counteract pharmaceutical manufacturers' incentives to physicians and consumers.

It is all too easy to point a finger at insurance companies claiming they are only concerned about cost. Ensuring quality and safety for consumers is of equal concern. “Newest” doesn't necessarily mean “safest” and documented cases show heavily promoted drugs rushed to market were later pulled due to adverse effects. Step therapy can act as a safeguard in ensuring clinically appropriate regimens are covered and abusive prescription utilization curtailed. Plans use step therapy to promote quality and efficacy to help ensure patients get the right drug — not just the newest and often most expensive one.

We have a responsibility to ensure New Yorkers have access to high quality and cost effective health care. Efforts to eliminate or “curb” therapeutic substitution run counter to both those objectives.

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Westchester Journal News Community View, Published October 20, 2016