

# PERSPECTIVE

TIMES UNION | Timesunion.com | Thursday, October 20, 2016

## VIEWPOINT

# Patients benefit from step therapy

By Leslie Moran

"Consumers," marshalled by well-funded disease groups and doctors, are orchestrating a statewide letters to the editor and opinion commentary campaign — too often featuring inflammatory rhetoric — urging Gov. Andrew Cuomo to sign legislation to curb insurers' ability to use "step therapy," or therapeutic substitution policies.

Unfortunately these efforts don't give New Yorkers all the facts about step therapy, instead painting the legislative proposal as "consumer protection."

Advocates' allegations that insurers are rejecting doctors' decisions and putting patients at risk are based on anecdotes, not facts. Fact one: Step therapy applies to a small percentage of prescriptions written. When disputes arise about the appropriate treatment for a given patient, exception procedures exist

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.

While it's easy to point a finger at insurance companies claiming they only care 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 be 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.

While the bill's supporters would have us believe doctors'

prescribing decisions always reflect what's therapeutically best for each individual patient, in reality 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 other payments.

There's legitimate concern the best interest of the patient may too often be subject to which drugs a doctor is being paid to promote. Step therapy helps counteract pharmaceutical incentive programs.

These policies can also help protect patients from being saddled with higher prescription co-payments and out-of-

pocket costs. An investigation by the University of Michigan and Ohio State University, reported in the May 9 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.

Moreover, the report found therapeutic substitution "offers the potential to decrease expenditure and potentially improve the efficiency of the health care system."

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 those objectives.

► *Leslie Moran, of Albany, is senior vice president of the New York Health Plan Association, a statewide trade organization representing health insurers.*