

Medicare Part D Pharmacy Updates

Dose Optimization

Today, health care organizations are being tasked with providing costly new technologies, expanding services, and improving quality of care – all while trying to control medical and pharmaceutical costs. One cost-saving measure that is simple to implement and well-accepted by providers and patients alike is dose optimization. Dose optimization refers to the identification of patients who receive multiple units (tablets or capsules) of a lower-strength, once-daily maintenance medication, and consolidating (or “optimizing”) the dosing regimen to an equivalent daily dosage of the same medication given as a single unit. This intervention is particularly successful for those medications available in a number of different strengths with parity (or near-parity) pricing.

For example, both the 20 mg and 40 mg strengths of LIPITOR[®] have a similar average wholesale price (AWP) of \$4.77 a tablet. A conversion from two 20 mg tablets to one 40 mg could save an estimated \$1,717 over 12 months. An extreme example of dose optimization would be switching a patient on REVLIMID[®] from five 5-mg tablets per day to a single 25-mg tablet per day. This could save the health care system nearly half a million dollars (\$486,131.52) annually! Dose optimization for drugs without parity pricing, such as AZOR[®], can also lead to significant cost savings when considered over an extended period of time, which is common for most chronic conditions. Simplifying the dosage schedule may also improve patient compliance and lower out-of-pocket costs for your patients.

If the savings are significant and the switch is simple, why don't providers do a better job of optimizing their patient drug regimens? There are several reasons, including:

- Lack of clinician awareness – a physician may be unaware that a medication is available in multiple dosage strengths and unaware of the price differences among those dosages.
- Inappropriate drug titration and drug sampling – physicians often use samples to test patient tolerability and provide a supply of medication through the titration phase of therapy. Once patients exhaust their samples, many physicians simply write prescriptions for the same multiple-units-per-day regimen to continue therapy. In addition, because a patient may be started on a lower-dosage strength, it is common for a physician to instruct his or her patient to use some multiple of the current prescription instead of writing a new one.

Following is a list of examples of once-daily medications that have multiple dosage strengths with either parity or near-parity pricing. This list is not exhaustive; many more examples exist. When in doubt, contact your local retail pharmacist to determine what strengths of a medication are available and if the pricing for these different strengths are the same or nearly similar.

Generic (BRAND Name)	Dosage Strengths	AWP pricing Example	Estimated Annualized Savings
Amlodipine/olmesartan (AZOR)	5/20mg, 5/40mg, 10/20mg, 10/40mg	5/20mg = \$2.91 10/40mg = \$4.18	\$457.20
Armodafinil (NUVIGIL)	50mg, 150mg, 250mg	50mg = 3.73 250mg = \$11.23	\$2,671.20
Atorvastatin (LIPITOR)	10mg, 20mg, 40mg, 80mg	20mg = \$4.77 40mg = \$4.77	\$1,717.20
Desvenlafaxine (PRISTIQ)	50mg, 100mg	50mg = \$4.26 100mg = \$4.26	\$1,533.60
Escitalopram (LEXAPRO)	5mg, 10mg, 20mg	10mg = \$3.37 20mg = \$3.52	\$1,159.20
Fesoterodine (TOVIAZ)	4mg, 8mg	4mg = \$4.78 8mg = \$4.78	\$1,720.00
Lansoprazole (PREVACID)	15mg, 30mg	15mg = \$6.25 30mg = \$6.25	\$2,250.00
Lenalidomide (REVLIMID)	5mg, 10mg, 15mg, 25mg	5mg = \$371.13 15mg = \$404.85	\$238,069.44
Rosuvastatin (CRESTOR)	5mg, 10mg, 20mg, 40mg	5mg = \$3.97 10mg = \$3.97	\$1,429.10
Thalidomide (THALOMID)	50mg, 100mg, 150mg, 200mg	50mg = \$136.58 150mg = \$237.05	\$62,168.40
Venlafaxine (EFFEXOR XR)	37.5mg, 75mg, 150mg	75mg = \$4.42 150mg = \$4.82	\$1,879.20

References:

1. Calabrese, D. Baldinger, S. Dose-Optimization Intervention Yields Significant Drug Cost Savings. JMCP 2002, vol 8 (2): 146-151.
2. Dose Optimization Program. BlueCross BlueShield Wellmark website. Accessed on 9.23.09 at: <http://www.wellmark.com>.