EmblemHealth

NEWS&NOTES

The Newsletter for EmblemHealth, GHI and HIP Providers

WINTER 2013

IN THIS ISSUE

UPDATE DIRECTORY INFORMATION

Brand vs. Generic: Implications to Health Care

The use of FDA-approved generics saves billions of dollars each week. Patients still benefit from the active ingredients, with significant decreases in insurance and co-payment costs. Despite this, pharmacists and managed care organizations often hear: "I need the brand name medication." Disproving some of the myths surrounding generic medications may help patients accept the generic alternative and ultimately decrease health care costs.

Each drug available in the US market has been reviewed and approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). When a company patents a new drug, the company is granted exclusive manufacturing rights for several years. Afterwards, other companies can develop a generic product using the same active ingredient but often with different fillers, coloring and packaging. While the brand-name manufacturer spent millions on research and approval of the medication, the generic manufacturer avoids these costs. Consequently, the average cost of a generic drug is considerably lower than its brand counterpart.

Generic drugs must meet stringent requirements set by the FDA. A generic dosage must show the same active ingredient, strength, quality, purity and potency as the brand name. Manufacturing, packaging and testing sites for generics are also held to the highest standards. In fact, many generic drugs are made in the same manufacturing plants as brand name drug products. Programs such as MedWatch conduct post-marketing surveillance, ensuring that appropriate action is taken to keep only safe products on the U.S. market.

There is no scientific evidence to support claims that a patient's generic medication is "not working." If a generic drug is not effective, consider these two possibilities: The active ingredient itself may not be the best choice (in which case the brand medicine would not work either) or there is a sensitivity or allergy to one of the fillers, coloring and packaging components. Choosing another generic manufacturer who uses different fillers, coloring and packaging can be tried before resorting to the brand medication. Reluctance to prescribe generics may result in an interruption in therapy while waiting to obtain approval from a third party payer. Substituting drugs within the same therapeutic class is generally reasonable and safe; the only exceptions are narrow therapeutic-index drugs and antibiotics.

Valuable health care resources, time and money can be saved by educating people about brand and generic drugs. Health care practitioners should help develop an individualized and consistent therapy plan using generic medications whenever possible.