

from Matthew Foster, PharmD, BCPS

Trends in Workers' Compensation Prescription Drug Expenditures

There have been several significant new financial and prescribing trends in the workers' compensation market during the last 24 months. The trends identified have been mined from the nation's largest single database of workers' compensation prescription transactions and assembled to provide insight into this difficult-to-manage area of healthcare. Understanding the current pharmaceutical industry and medication financial drivers in the workers' compensation industry is vital in providing insight into future trends. PMSI Clinical Pharmacist, Matthew Foster, PharmD, BCPS, has authored *Identified Trends in Prescription Drug Expenditures in the Workers' Compensation Market 2005–2006*. This report outlines the utilization trends and drivers for the top therapeutic classes in workers' compensation over the last 24 months. Below are some highlights from Dr. Foster's trends paper.



TOP PRESCRIBED THERAPEUTIC CLASSES BY PERCENT OF TOTAL MEDICATION EXPENSE

Medication Class	Typical Medications	2006 Industry
Narcotic Analgesics (Opioids)	OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Lortab, etc.	32.5%
Anticonvulsants	Neurontin, Lyrica, Gabitril, etc.	10.7%
Anti-inflammatory (NSAID)	Celebrex, Mobic, Motrin, Voltaren, etc.	10.5%
Muscle Relaxants	Flexeril, Skelaxin, Soma, etc.	9.1%
Antidepressants	Cymbalta, Effexor, Zoloft, Lexapro	8.0%
Dermatologics	Lidoderm	5.3%
GI Medications	Nexium, Prevacid, Pepcid, Zantac	4.4%
Sedatives	Ambien, Lunesta, Restoril	3.8%
Anti-anxiety	Xanax, Ativan, etc.	2.1%
Antipsychotics	Seroquel, Zyprexa, Geodon, etc.	1.6%
Total percent of Top 10 medication classes		88%

There has been very little change in the ranking of the Top 10 drug classes over the last two years, mainly due to the large percentage of total expenditures within the Top 3 classes (see above table). Opioid analgesics, NSAIDs, and anticonvulsants are all used in the treatment of pain syndromes. Although the top medication classes have not changed significantly, the individual medications within each of the classes have changed considerably. The Top 5 medication classes alone still account for almost 70% of the total drug expenditures, and the Top 10 account for 88% of all expenditures.

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Narcotic Analgesics

Short-Acting Opioid Analgesics. Although the hydrocodone-APAP and oxycodone-APAP tablets remain the most commonly prescribed short-acting narcotic analgesics, the high cost of oral fentanyl products continues to make the largest financial impact in this category.

Long-Acting Opioid Analgesics. Long-acting opioids will continue as an option in the treatment of chronic pain. The loss of a generic version of OxyContin and the increasing utilization of Opana ER and Ultram ER may result in significantly higher costs in this class.

Anticonvulsants

The use of anticonvulsants will continue to expand within workers' compensation patients as an option in treating "chronic pain." Lyrica and Gabapentin will continue to dominate the medications in this class.

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

The NSAIDs will continue to be used commonly for the treatment of mild-to-moderate pain. There are continuing concerns with the safety of these agents when used for extended periods of time. Although the total costs have been decreasing since 2005, this is expected to level off or begin a steady increase as Celebrex has been advertised to consumers and healthcare practitioners during 2007.

Skeletal Muscle Relaxants

The therapeutic class of muscle relaxants will continue at the current rates of prescribing and total costs.

Antidepressants

Antidepressant use may remain flat with regard to total transactions, but costs may continue to increase due to increases in prescribing of brand name medications such as Cymbalta and Effexor XR.

Dermatologics

Although the use of Lidoderm is continuing to rise only slightly, the total costs will continue to increase due to more frequent administration of the patches and as medication prices rise.

Gastrointestinal Medications—Anti-Ulcer Agents (Antacids)

Because of the high use of NSAIDs acutely and chronically in workers' compensation injuries and the increased awareness to the dangers of GI ulceration, the use of antacids will continue to slowly increase. Total costs have been relatively stable over the last 12 months and should continue to remain stable.

Sedatives

Sedative use should level off in the next year. Expenses will most likely continue to increase despite the availability of a generic formulation of Ambien.

Anti-Anxiety

There are no significant increases in utilization of anti-anxiety agents expected. Costs are expected to level off or continue at a slight decrease.

Antipsychotics

The impact of antipsychotics on total medication expenses remains low; however, it continues to be an important medication class due to its use with injured workers who are primarily outside of the approved medication use.

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