



POLICY & PRACTICE

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First Avandia Claims Settled

GlaxoSmithKline has settled the first court-scheduled case alleging that its diabetes therapy rosiglitazone (Avandia) increased risks of heart attack and stroke, the company confirms. The case was due to go to trial on June 1, but GSK settled out of court, said a company spokeswoman. In May, plaintiffs' lawyers told news outlets that the company paid \$60 million to settle 700 cases that didn't have court dates. GSK refuses to comment on those cases. However, the company now says it still expects the first individual claim to go to trial in October. Class action claims will also be heard in October, said the GSK spokeswoman.

Company Discloses Physician Pay

The Affordable Care Act requires drug and device manufacturers to disclose payment arrangements with physicians starting in 2012, but the device manufacturer Medtronic has already begun posting such data on its Web site. Physicians are listed by name, location, type of payment received (including royalties), and amount received. They are list-

ed only if they received more than \$5,000. The company said it had also developed a new set of guidelines on physician collaboration. Those policies will limit the total payment made to any physician for services to the company and will put payment and research restrictions on physicians who earn royalties from the company. Medtronic said it will update the physician data quarterly.

Implantable Pricing Studied

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) has asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate the pricing and use of implantable medical devices. The study is expected to take at least 9 months, according to James Cosgrove, a director in GAO's health care office.

Tobacco Coverage to Be Broader

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is proposing to cover tobacco counseling services for all adults and pregnant women who are entitled to benefits under Part A or Part B of Medicare. Such counseling has been covered only for people with signs or symp-

toms of tobacco-related disease. Under the new plan, anyone who uses tobacco or desires the counseling would be entitled to two counseling "attempts" per year, which would include a maximum of eight intermediate (3-minute) or intensive (10-minute) sessions per year. A final coverage decision is pending, after comments on the proposal were taken through late June.

Referrals Suit Nets Big Payout

A whistle-blower alleging that the Christ Hospital of Mount Auburn, Ohio, made illegal referrals is due to receive \$23.5 million under a settlement negotiated by the United States Department of Justice with the hospital and its parent, the Health Alliance of Greater Cincinnati. Cardiologist Harry Fry helped expose the scheme at the hospital, where he formerly worked. According to the department, the hospital and the alliance gave slots at its outpatient testing center only to physicians who agreed to refer their cardiac business to Christ Hospital. Cardiologists whose referrals amounted to 2% or more of the hospital's gross revenues received a corresponding percentage of time at the outpatient center, said a Department of Justice statement on the settlement. The arrangements were alleged to violate the federal antikick-back statute and the False Claims Act.

The alliance and hospital paid \$108 million to the federal government but admitted no wrongdoing.

Women Know Little About Stroke

A survey found that few women could name the primary stroke symptoms and many weren't concerned about experiencing a stroke in their lifetimes. Commissioned by HealthyWomen, the National Stroke Association, and the American College of Emergency Physicians, the online survey of about 2,000 adult women found that only 27% could name more than two of the six primary stroke symptoms (sudden numbness or weakness on one side of the face; sudden numbness or weakness in an arm or leg; sudden confusion, or trouble speaking or understanding speech; sudden trouble seeing; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination; sudden severe headache with no known cause). About 30% were aware that women are at higher risk for stroke than are men. "The results of this survey underscore what we see too often with women when it comes to dealing with their unique health issues," Elizabeth Battaglini Cahill, executive director of HealthyWomen, said in a statement. The biotech company Genentech Inc. provided support for the survey.

—Alicia Ault

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