Cancer Drugs Pose Challenge in Medicare Part D

BY CHRISTINE KILGORE

Contributing Writer

WASHINGTON — Physicians treating older cancer patients must actively help them choose Medicare Part D prescription drug plans with formularies that best cover not only current medications but future needs as well, health care consultant Mary Kruczynski said at a conference sponsored by Elsevier Oncology.

"Get online and check their formulary, and if [your patient] hasn't chosen a plan, think outside the box and list all the drugs they'll possibly need in the future," said Ms. Kruczynski, a policy analyst and board member of the Community Oncology Alliance, a Washington-based lobbying group.

Although most physicians do not have time for such legwork, "the current reality is, you can't afford not to. …If we don't, our patients can't get treated," said Ms. Kruczynski. "If [your patients] go to the drug store and get told 'it's not on the formulary,' they come back to you," she said.

When cancer drugs appear on multiple formularies, pricing variations can be significant—and physicians and staff might even want to help patients navigate such variations, especially as more and more oral drugs for cancer become available.

A recent cost study of seven oral cancer drugs in three markets documented significant variations, she noted. The cost of Arimidex (anastrozole), for instance, was 72% higher in Portland than in Virginia Beach (Commun. Oncol. 2006;3:753-5).

Formularies under Medicare Part D also are increasingly restrictive. Many insurers have added coverage of generic drugs and reduced coverage of brand-name drugs; some also are adopting new techniques to control the use of certain drugs. "They're asking for data, blood counts, medical records … and checking doses," she said. "Some carriers now require you to get every prescription authorized."

Physicians who care for patients with cancer, in the meantime, have "been bending over backwards to try to get every drug our patients need for them, even if they have to switch them from Part D to Part B … even if they get them to their doughnut hole," or coverage gap, " and bring them into the office for an infusible under Part B," Ms. Kruczynski said.

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) recognized such actions in its January 2007 report, she said.

The report, which focuses on Medicare payments for Part B drugs and includes some commentary on Part D drugs, notes the word of physicians who work with patients to determine whether it is better to prescribe the drugs under Part D or Part B.

The MedPAC report also relates physician accounts of patients who reach the doughnut hole and either neglect their treatment or try to stretch out their drug regimens until coverage starts again.

Concerns about patients "brown bagging" physician-administered drugs so that they can be covered under Part D—as well as observations that some physicians have established in-house pharmacies to remedy the problem—also are mentioned in the MedPAC report, Ms. Kruczynski said.

Insurance companies also are "changing their formularies midstream," she said. That is, although Medicare drug plans are permitted to keep the same name while substantially changing costs and benefits each year, the plans sometimes fail to send out required change notices. The UnitedHealth Group, which serves the largest segment of the Medicare Part D market, has done this.

The issue of formulary changes has been included in at least some of the 42 House and 31 Senate bills addressing problems with Medicare Part D, Ms. Kruczynski noted.

For now, she said, "it's coming down to us again." By helping patients navigate Part D, "we're essentially administering the plans of private insurance carriers for free." But for now, she emphasized, it's essential for the health of patients.

Elsevier Oncology and this news organization are wholly owned subsidiaries of Elsevier. ■

CLASSIFIEDS

Also Available at www.internalmedicinenews.com

PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Mississippi Medical Director

AREA MEDICAL DIRECTOR - Keystone Emergency Management Group, a Memphis-based E.R. staffing company, seeks BC/BE ER physician or FP/IM w/ER experience to provide **clinical and administrative leadership** in hospitals throughout MS. Keystone's flexible scheduling allows time for family and recreational pursuits! Competitive compensation with stipend and paid malpractice. No on-call responsibilities. Please contact Jeannie Diaz TODAY—**(866) 291-8600** or email CV to jdiaz@keystonehealthcare.com **OTHER PT & FT ER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE!**

INTERNIST

Practice opportunity for BE/BC Internist for an established multi-specialty group. Excellent starting salary and fringe benefits. Paid CME, license, relocation expenses and malpractice through Federal Tort Claims Act. If you would like to join a group committed to quality care and preventive health, please send resume to: Scott Russell, D.O., Medical Director, Coastal Family Health Center, P.O. Box 475, Biloxi, Mississippi 39533. Phone: (228) 865-4448. Fax: (228) 863-4148. EOE

Hospice Medical Director

Hosp employ Med Dir. for new 30 bed inpatient Hospice House in multi-university Metro SC assoc/w growing 319 bed HS. Palliative care exper. $180 base salary w/excellent benefit package. **Donohue and Associates 800-831-5475 Fax 314-984-8246** e/m: donohueandassoc@aol.com

Virginia

Hospital employ - trad IM Shenandoah Valley-90 min. to Washington D.C. - 1-7 call. Salary, bonus & benefits. **800-831-5475 Fax: 314-984-8246 E/m:donohueandassoc@aol.com**

Buffalo Area-Join well estab & lucrative 2 phy Trad IM priv pract. in fam orient Lake Ontario comm 30 mins to Buffalo assoc/w 205 bed HS. 1-3 call. Excell salary, bonus, bene & future prtnrshp. $350K + income proj. MPSA site. **800-831-5475 Fax: 314-984-8246 donohueandassoc@aol.com**

PA Hospitalist

Hosp. employ. post join 3 Hospitalists - South Central PA - 2 hrs to Pittsburgh, Baltimore & D.C. Assoc/w UPMC facility. Negot. sched. – 12 hr. shifts. $180K excel benefit pack. & occ. malpractice. **800-831-5475 F: 314-984-8246** e/m: donohueandassoc@aol.com

SC Univ Comm-Hosp/employ - sponsored outptnt only IM posit referring inpatient to hospitalist in univ comm -Blue Ridge Mnts-45 min Greenville & 1+ hr to Atlanta. Mod 169 bed hosp. Excel sal, bonus & ben. pack. **Donohue & Assoc 800-831-5475 E/M: F: 314-984-8246**

Moving?
Look to Classifieds for practices available.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

BOARD CERTIFICATION IN ANTI-AGING MEDICINE & REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

JOIN THE WORLDS #1 MEDICAL SOCIETY LEADING THE ANTI-AGING REVOLUTION

Since 1992

Ronald Klatz MD, DO
President, A4M

1-800-558-1267
WWW.WORLDHEALTH.NET

Disclaimer

INTERNAL MEDICINE NEWS assumes the statements made in classified advertisements are accurate, but cannot investigate the statements and assumes no responsibility or liability concerning their content. The Publisher reserves the right to decline, withdraw, or edit advertisements. Every effort will be made to avoid mistakes, but responsibility cannot be accepted for clerical or printer errors.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEADLINES

Absolute deadline for all advertising copy, cancellations, and changes is: the 1st of the month prior to month of publication.

All copy, cancellations, and changes for issues must be received in the Classified Advertising office by 12 noon of the deadline date, whether via phone or mail.

For further information, contact Robin Cryan, **Internal Medicine News,** 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010. (800) 379-8785, (212) 633-3160. FAX: (212) 633-3820 Email ad to: r.cryan@elsevier.com

ATTORNEYS

CAN YOU COLLECT DISABILITY INCOME BENEFITS?

Our law firm represents medical and business professionals who are either preparing to file or have been denied benefits under their insurance policy. We also handle lump-sum buyouts.

Established in 1979, our litigation experience and disability claim handling knowledge has allowed us to help our clients receive disability benefits. Visit our website at: **DiAttorney.com**

FREE PHONE CONSULTATION
REPRESENTING CLIENTS NATIONWIDE

800-797-7091
Call to learn how we can help you with your disability claim.

DELL & SCHAEFER
ATTORNEYS REPRESENTING YOUR FUTURE
DISABILITY INCOME DIVISION

Hollywood