Merck Freezes ADAP Price For Isentress

August 1, 2008 By Peter Staley

Chalk up another HIV drug pricing victory for the Fair Pricing Coalition (FPC). Merck announced today, in response to a request from the FPC, to freeze the price it charges state-run ADAP programs for Isentress, its first-in-class integrase inhibitor. They will freeze it at its launch price through the end of 2010.

FPC is a largely unknown (they don't get lots of press) activist coalition that does some of the most effective HIV treatment activism in the U.S. They describe themselves as follows:

> The Fair Pricing Coalition is an ad hoc group of community-based activists who work on drug pricing issues with pharmaceutical companies in the field of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. A much larger group of AIDS and hepatitis organizations and concerned individuals participate in the FPC through consensus statements and petitions. The overall goal of the Fair Pricing Coalition is to stop the upward creep in the cost of drugs.

The core group of the FPC consists of experienced activists, all of whom wear multiple hats and typically

speak for their own parent organizations as well as on behalf of the FPC. Many are also members of ATAC (the AIDS Treatment Activists Coalition) and some are people who advocate on behalf of federal support programs, such as the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). Some members are physicians who speak on behalf of providers. Almost all are members of various community advisory boards and non-profit organizations that meet with the pharmaceutical industry on a range of topics. The focus of the FCP is drug pricing and how it impacts patients, public and private payers, and providers. The core group meets with and coordinates discussions over pricing with individual pharmaceutical companies.

One of the primary activists driving FPC's work is Martin Delaney, who I've blogged about before. The Merck announcement came in a letter addressed to Marty (click here for the PDF version).

This victory comes on the heels of similar HIV drug price freezes from Gilead and Boehringer-Ingelheim in June. Sadly, those announcements were incorrectly reported in the press as responses to supposed pressure from Los Angeles-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF). In fact, the hard-nosed advocacy was all done by the FPC, and AHF basically piggybacked on their work by sending out a letter requesting the freezes and issuing a quick press release once the companies agreed. It also didn't hurt that AHF's treasurer, Gregg H. Alton, is also a senior vice president and general counsel at Gilead (i.e. "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"). AHF has a sad history of trying to take credit for others' work which I'd rather not blog about here. Today is the FPC's day.

Congrats to the Fair Pricing Coalition for another stunning victory.

Addendum: The FPC issued its own press release today outlining the success it has had against escalating prices of HIV drugs, including deals with Gilead Sciences, GlaxoSmithKline and Merck. See the PDF version of this press release here.

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