Wary Traveler

May 15, 2008 By Paul Dalton

Been away from the blog for a few days. I was on the road, traveling to Birmingham, Alabama for a treatment update meeting. Normally being on the road doesn?t keep me from wanting to write, but this time it did.

I am an experienced traveler- more so than I can really believe. Most of the time I travel pretty well, but this trip kicked my butt. I was tired the whole time and had a really hard time getting any work done.

It was great to do the meeting in Birmingham- another city I can chalk up on my list of places I might never have been if it weren?t for my job. I wish I could say that I got a sense of the place, but I didn?t. I got in after midnight on Monday night, did my meeting on Tuesday afternoon- rested the rest of the day and left early in the morning on Wednesday.

There has been some interesting chatter going on in the treatment activist world about Abbott. Abbott, makers of Kaletra and Norvir, are being sued for their notorious 400% price hike on Norvir. As part of the suit, the plaintiffs filed to have some internal Abbott docs released. Some of them have been and they are telling.

Abbott is not well liked by treatment activists. Not at all. When they quadrupled the price of Norvir, many of us said that there were two clear reasons for doing so- first to make more money off of Norvir, which was only being used as a booster at that point. That part was clear. We also argued that they were trying to give Kaletra a pricing advantage over all other boosted PIs- which it did.

If you want to glimpse inside Abbott take a look at the documents. They paint a truly ugly picture. At one point they considered stopping the sales of Norvir altogether- which would have left Kaletra as the only boosted PI option. Short of that ?nuclear option? they settled on an unprecedented price gouging.

This behavior has led all treatment activists to despise Abbott. It has also created a bit of an activist controversy over whether we, as a community, should talk to Abbott. Right after the price hike the community basically boycotted Abbott. This made sense at the time- action needed to be taken to show our collective displeasure. I don?t think it makes sense anymore.

Not talking to Abbott feels better, but basically lets them off the hook. When they don?t talk to us they get to do what they want, with impunity. For example they developed a heat stable (Meltrex) formulation of Kaletra a while back, which meant it didn?t need to be refrigerated anymore. This is particularly important for the developing world, where maintaining a cold chain can be impossible.

They have not however developed a Meltrex formulation of Norvir. There is no reason that they can?t develop one, but it isn?t really in their immediate interests to do so. Without the activist breathing down

their corporate necks, it has been that much easier for them to dawdle on this.

Below is the link to the released documents.

http://www.prescriptionaccess.org/lawsuitssettlements/current_lawsuits?id=0022

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