

How physicians can help patients cope with EpiPen price spike

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Last month, EpiPen manufacturer Mylan has acknowledged the significant increase in the price of the popular epinephrine autoinjector since it acquired the device in 2007, and announced a new generic option that will still cost more than the previous price of the brand name product.

Physicians, medical associations, politicians and patients have all criticized Mylan's actions in what is seen as the latest price spike of a high-demand drug by a pharmaceutical monopoly.

Purvi Parikh, MD, an allergist and immunologist and spokesperson for the Allergy & Asthma Network, told *Healio Internal Medicine* that the price increase would affect patient adherence and their safety.

"Unfortunately, this is a reality for patients in that the price increase combined with high insurance deductibles has forced them to choose between medication and basic necessities such as food and housing," she said. "Many have foregone the EpiPen or gotten less than is recommended to save money."



Purvi Parikh

Parikh acknowledged that some patients will have no option but to use an EpiPen that has expired.

"The danger is that the efficacy and potency of the medication decreases over time so it may not work as you would hope in the case of a life-threatening reaction," she said. "If no other option exists, we still recommend using the expired one, as it is still better than no epinephrine."

How physicians can support patients

Parikh did note, however, that there are several ways that physicians can help patients cope with the price increase.

"Physicians can help by making patients aware of cost-saving programs by Mylan as well as other organizations such as the Allergy & Asthma Network and the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology," she said. "Physicians can also help advocate to the government and insurance entities to get the medication placed on preventative drug lists so they are not susceptible to high deductibles."

Tonya Winders, CEO and president of the Allergy & Asthma Network, shared more options for patients who are struggling to afford the medication.

"Patients with commercial insurance should use the coupon/discount card, which will reduce their payment by up to \$300," she said. "Patients without commercial insurance who qualify for Medicaid should receive their EpiPen for \$0 out of pocket. Families that have no insurance should access either the generic Adrenaclick or

generic EpiPen when it's available. It is always wise to use GoodRX.com to determine which retail pharmacy outlet offers the best pricing in your area."

Winders also noted that the only other approved epinephrine autoinjector is the generic Adrenaclick, but it is only available in limited markets.



Tonya Winders

What does the generic option mean?

In a press release issued this past week, Mylan announced that it would launch a generic version of their EpiPen in the next several weeks.

"We understand the deep frustration and concerns associated with the cost of EpiPen to the patient, and have always shared the public's desire to ensure that this important product be accessible to anyone who needs it," **Heather Bresch**, Mylan CEO, said in the release. "Our decision to launch a generic alternative to EpiPen is an extraordinary commercial response, which required the cooperation of our partner. However, because of the complexity and opaqueness of today's branded pharmaceutical supply chain and the increased shifting of costs to patients as a result of high deductible health plans, we determined that bypassing the brand system in this case and offering an additional alternative was the best option. Generic drugs have a long, proven track record of delivering significant savings to both patients and the overall health care system. The launch of a generic EpiPen, which follows the steps we took last week on the brand to immediately reduce patients' out-of-pocket costs, will offer a long-term solution to further reduce costs and ease the burden and complexity of the process on the patient."

Rachel Sachs, an associate professor at the Washington University in St. Louis School of Law, explained that Mylan could have several reasons for launching a new generic, aside from public relations.

"By bringing the first generic EpiPen to market, Mylan has now planted its flag in the generics space," she wrote in a blog entry for The Petrie-Flam Center at Harvard Law School. "Although epinephrine (the drug inside the EpiPen) is now generic and cheap to produce and sell, companies do seem to find it difficult to replicate the device portion of the EpiPen, with Sanofi's product recently removed from the market due to dosing issues and Teva's application for a generic denied by the FDA with no public explanation just a few months ago. Mylan has now benchmarked a new price for those products if they return — they must price below \$300 for a two-pack to compete effectively with Mylan."

Sachs also speculated whether Mylan was attempting to maintain its significant portion of the market with the brand name EpiPen.

"I wonder whether their generic will be fully substitutable by pharmacists, a question which may depend on the state laws involved (and which Mylan has lobbied to influence)," she wrote. "I wonder whether the EpiPen comes with training or other easy-to-use tools that will be missing from the generic, and as long as Mylan provides copay coupons only for the branded product, parents facing equivalent copays in either situation will choose the branded EpiPen. I wonder whether Mylan will not offer discounts off the list price for the generic (except those required by law for Medicaid), meaning that the actual prices paid by insurers will be roughly

comparable. And finally, because a significant portion of EpiPen purchasing happens during the back-to-school season, Mylan has done little harm to its revenues this year. It is only next year that this product may affect their bottom line."

Parikh said that various factors go into pricing, such as production costs and inflation, which may account for why the newly-announced generic will be more expensive than the EpiPen has been previously.

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