

NEWS DIGEST

- China: Big Pharma's lose out in China's latest round of drug price cuts
- US: HRA Pharma bids to bring first OTC contraceptive pill to US
- UK: NICE expands access of Tremfya in England and Wales
- Germany: Proposed €1 billion solidarity contribution



China: Big Pharma's lose out in China's latest round of drug price cuts

Big pharma companies' are losing out on their off-patent drugs as generics makers offer discounts to win large tender offers in China, elbowing out original developers.

In China's latest volume-based procurement (VBP), more than 200 companies making 60 off-patent drugs significantly reduced their prices by an average 48% to win supply contracts with public hospitals, according to People's Daily.

Some of the originators that are walking away empty handed include:

- Eisai's liver cancer drug Lenvima
- AstraZeneca's beta blocker Seloken/Toprol XL
- Pfizer's kidney cancer drug Sutent
- Boehringer Ingelheim's second-generation EGFR lung cancer med Giotrif
- Roche's first-generation EGFR inhibitor Tarceva and flu drug Tamiflu
- Gilead Sciences' antiviral Vemlidy (TAF)
- Novartis' antiemetic Zofran and hormone therapy Sandostatin

In the end, only four originators got in with an average discount of 67%, People Daily reports. They are Pfizer's antibiotic Tygacil, Astellas' antifungal Mycamine, Almirall's antibiotic Kestine and Italian firm Bracco Imaging's imaging agent Isovue.

Reports indicate that the contracts could save China 18.5 billion yuan (\$2.75 billion) a year.

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US: HRA Pharma bids to bring first OTC contraceptive pill to US

Following its \$2 billion takeover by Ireland-headquartered Perrigo, HRA Pharma has now become the first drugmaker in the US to seek approval for an over-the-counter contraceptive pill.

The move comes as access to birth control becomes a pivotal issue following the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court last month to strip US women of their constitutional protection for the right to abortion.

HRA Pharma has filed for a prescription to OTC switch for Opill, a decades-old daily progestin-only pill.

The company's chief strategic operations and innovation officer – Frédérique Welgryn – said that the application “marks a ground-breaking moment in contraceptive access and reproductive equity in the US”, where there are around three million unintended pregnancies every year.

Access to birth control is more important than ever after Roe v Wade was struck down, amid reports that anti-abortion campaigners in the US are now turning their attention elsewhere.

HRA Pharma is anticipating that the FDA will hold an advisory committee meeting to discuss the Opill switch and thinks it may be able to get approval in the first half of next year if all goes to plan.

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UK: NICE expands access of Tremfya in England and Wales

NICE has updated its recommendations for NHS use of Johnson & Johnson's IL-23 inhibitor Tremfya in the treatment of psoriatic arthritis (PsA), expanding the pool of patients eligible for treatment with the drug.

The health technology assessment (HTA) organisation initially recommended Tremfya (guselkumab) as a treatment option for adults with active psoriatic arthritis last year, but limited it to patients with moderate-to-severe psoriasis symptoms.

The earlier guidance meant that use of the drug was restricted to patients with a body surface area of at least 3% affected by plaque psoriasis and a Psoriasis Area and Severity Index (PASI) score greater than 10.

The latest update means the NHS can now make Tremfya available in England and Wales to a wider group of patients with PsA, without restrictions based on psoriasis symptom severity.

Active PsA is defined as peripheral arthritis with three or more tender joints and three or more swollen joints.

Tremfya can be used – alone or with methotrexate – as an option for treating PsA in adults whose condition has not responded well enough to disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) or who cannot tolerate these treatments.

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Germany: Proposed €1 billion solidarity contribution

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach has proposed that the pharmaceutical industry pay a one-off “solidarity contribution” of €1 billion as part of efforts to make up the €17 billion deficit of the statutory health insurance funds, reports the local press.

It is understood that reforms to the AMNOG procedure are also on the cards though details have not yet been released. The pharmaceutical industry have expressed their concern at the plans.

Han Steutel, President of the Association of Research-Based Pharmaceutical Companies (vfa), has suggested that the proposed reforms could become an obstacle to innovation and investment in Germany. Meanwhile, Dr. Hans-Georg Feldmeier, the Chairman of the Federal Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry (BPI) has reportedly voiced concern that making these payments will be extremely difficult in times of rising costs and instability of supply chains.

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