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Nordics: Shared strategy for the joint procurement of hospital medicines

In a statement, the Nordic Pharmaceuticals Forum (Nordisk Lægemiddel Forum, NLF) has announced that the participating countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) are working on a shared strategy for the joint procurement of hospital medicines which they hope to complete by the summer.

Tommy Juhl Nielsen, Divisional Director of Hospital Procurement at Sykehusinnkjøp (the Norwegian hospital procurement agency) commented, "I hope that our Nordic collaboration will achieve even better results than we could have achieved separately. We have to exploit the situation that we can have joint price negotiations with suppliers and joint procurement of pharmaceuticals." He continued, "Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark are struggling to secure supplies of hospital pharmaceuticals, and to get the most favourable prices for new, expensive hospital pharmaceuticals". Expanding Nordic collaboration in this area must not be overly complex but must aim to build a system to "secure solutions in a very complex area".

According to Nielsen, the NFL could also have a wider influence on European collaboration, "First we have to be one hundred percent clear about our common Nordic voice. But there is no doubt that we in the Nordic countries, believe that we have good and sustainable solutions to secure supplies of pharmaceuticals and achieve financially advantageous prices. We also hope we can use the solutions to make the EU an even stronger market for purchases of hospital pharmaceuticals".

The NDF was established back in 2015. The Forum is currently collaborating in four areas: horizon scanning, security of supply, new expensive pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing sustainability and joint Nordic tendering procedures.

UK: Early access granted to Argenx's efgartigimod alfa

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has issued a positive opinion on the inclusion of Argenx's efgartigimod alfa in the Early Access to Medicines Scheme (EAMS). As a result, adult patients with AChR-antibody seropositive generalised myasthenia gravis (gMG), including patients with refractory gMG who have failed, not tolerated or are ineligible for licensed treatment, will have access to the drug whilst the MHRA reviews the marketing authorisation application.

The stated aim of the EAMS is to provide earlier availability of promising new unlicensed medicines and medicines used outside their licence, to UK patients that have a high unmet clinical need. Products included in the scheme are intended to treat, diagnose or prevent seriously debilitating or life-threatening conditions where there are no adequate treatment options.

According to pharmaphorum, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is also reviewing efgartigimod alfa for marketing authorisation in the EU. Both the MHRA and EMA decisions are expected before the end of the year.

US: Launch prices for new drugs rise 20% annually - Report

The average launch prices of new drugs in the US grew 20% annually between 2008 and 2021 according to the results of a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, details of which were reported in the local press. The average launch price in the US rose from $2,115 in 2008 to $180,007 in 2021. Even after adjusting for manufacturers' increasing focus on more complex and high-cost drugs to treat orphan diseases and rare cancers, and discounts that manufacturers grant some purchasers, launch prices still reportedly grew 11% annually. This compares to an average 1% to 3% annual inflation rate for healthcare services.

The study also reportedly notes that over 47% of new drugs introduced in 2020 and 2021 cost more than $150,000 per year, compared to 9% of new drugs from 2008 to 2013. The study is based on an analysis of list prices of 548 drugs launched between 2008 and 2021 and uses price data from SSR Health.

The researchers behind the study have reportedly called on Congress to act to address increasing drug prices. According to the press accounts, Senator Manchin of West Virginia is understood to be in talks with the Senate majority leader on a revised spending bill that would address high prescription drug prices. Details are as yet unclear, but the press indicates that the new measures could mirror the provisions that were included in the Build Back Better Act, including allowing Medicare to negotiate prices for some top-selling drugs, and limiting price increases once drugs are marketed.

UK: What is the New Innovative Medicines Fund and What Does it Mean for Patients and for Pharma?

The Innovative Medicines Fund (IMF), which was first announced in July 2021 by NHS England, officially launched on the 7th of June 2022.

The IMF builds upon the success of the Cancer Drugs Fund (CDF) and is expected to work in the same way. Like the CDF, £340 million a year has been allocated to fund treatments that are promising but have uncertainty surrounding their cost-effectiveness. These funds – together worth £680 million per year – allow the NHS to prescribe these treatments to patients while further data is gathered to address uncertainty. Unlike the CDF, the IMF will focus on innovative but non-oncological drugs.

If successful, the IMF will facilitate speedy access to medicines where patients may have otherwise had to wait far longer, or not had access at all. In particular, it is hoped that the IMF will improve the treatment of rare diseases for patients in England.2 These aims are in line with several other health policies being pursued, including:

- The priority to "improving access to specialist care, treatment and drugs", outlined in the England Rare Disease Action Plan, published in February 20224
- The commitment to allow more flexibility in NICE assessments when it is particularly difficult to generate sufficient evidence, outlined in NICE's new methods, published in January 20225

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Paul Craddy

MANAGING DIRECTOR
& FOUNDER

Graham Foxon

MANAGING DIRECTOR
& FOUNDER

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