

Cholesterol surpasses depression as top disease category.

Every 6 months, *Emergis* - one of Canada's largest drug card networks - publishes a report that lists the top drugs paid by their network, including claims paid by group insurance sponsors across Canada. The following analysis offers some insight into current and emerging drug trends.

Lipitor, used for lowering cholesterol, is now the #1 medication, surpassing **Losec**, which is used for ulcers. Three different doses of Lipitor made the top 10 list, accounting for \$57 million paid in the first six months of 2005 (38% of the top 10).

Tylenol 3 continues to be the most frequently prescribed drug. However, it was ranked only #134 in total cost due to its low average prescription cost of \$4.00, compared to \$120 for **Lipitor**.

A few years ago we wrote about the introduction of **Remicade**, a new drug used for Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and Crohn's Disease. Claims for Remicade have more than tripled since 2001, placing it in the top 10 drugs with an average prescription cost of \$3,528. **Enbrel**, another expensive RA drug has climbed from #43 in 2001 to #9. Annual treatments for both drugs are approximately \$20,000. The onset of RA peaks between the ages of 25 to 50 and affects women more than twice as often as men. According to the *Canadian Rheumatology Association*, approximately 300,000 Canadians (1 in 100 people) are thought to suffer from RA.

Gleevec, introduced in 2002 to treat myeloid leukemia at an

annual cost of \$39,000, was prescribed only 249 times during the first 6 months of 2002. During the past six months it was prescribed 782 times for a cost of more than \$2.7 million.

Vioxx, an anti-inflammatory drug, typically in the top 10, was removed from the market on September 30, 2004 due to safety concerns. **Celebrex**, also used as an anti-inflammatory drug has dropped from #6 to #19. **Paxil**, used to treat depression, lost its patent protection in 2003 and has dropped from #4 to #215; however, this category of drugs is still growing.

When comparing drugs that made the top 10 list in 2001 and 2005, the number of prescriptions increased by 15%; however, the dollar cost of the 2005 list increased by 64%, indicating a rise in drug *utilization, substitution* and *inflation* (together, these three cost drivers are called "trend").

In the *generic drug* category, the top drugs were only ranked #38 and #64 in terms of total claims. Clearly, escalating drug costs are driven by newer *brand name drugs*.

For the first time in years, depression is no longer the number one disease category. In 2004, cholesterol surpassed depression in dollars paid. The fastest growing major categories from 2002 to 2004 were diabetes at 157% and RA at 87%. In Q3 of 2005, high blood pressure and ulcers have also surpassed depression.

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Top 10 Drugs (\$) (Emergis Q1&2 2005)

Rank	Q2-04	Name	Disease
1	2	Lipitor 10mg	Cholesterol
2	3	Lipitor 20mg	Cholesterol
3	1	Losec 20mg	Ulcers
4	4	Pantoloc 40mg	Ulcers
5	8	Nexium 40mg	Ulcers
6	5	Effexor xr 75mg	Depression
7	9	Altace 10mg	Blood pressure
8	11	Remicade	Rheumatoid Arthritis
9	14	Enbrel	Rheumatoid Arthritis
10	16	Lipitor 40mg	Cholesterol

Top Disease States (3-year Survey)

