

Subject: Changes to Coverage of Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)

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MESSAGE:

Proton pump inhibitors are medications that keep the stomach from producing too much acid. They are used to treat gastroesophageal reflux disease and other acid-related disorders. The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has established that all proton pump inhibitors are therapeutically similar and equally effective.

As of October 1, 2016, government will change the coverage provided for proton pump inhibitors for all government sponsored programs, including the low-income health benefits programs (e.g. AISH, Income Support, AAHB). Coverage will still be provided, but government will only pay for the lowest cost proton pump inhibitors, which are the generic versions of Pariet (rabeprazole) and Tecta (pantoprazole magnesium).

There will be a four-month transition period, allowing time for persons to adapt to a new drug.

If a person experiences a severe allergic reaction, the individual's physician can request an exception by contacting Alberta Blue Cross (ABC).

If a request is submitted to the Health Benefits Exception Committee (HBEC) or AISH Health Benefits Exception Process (HBEP) it will be forwarded to ABC for a decision. The HBEC/HBEP will not be making decisions regarding these types of requests.

If a person wishes to continue using their current higher-cost proton pump inhibitor, they may do so but will be required to pay the cost difference.

For your information in responding to any client inquiries regarding this change, a Q and A document is attached.

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

Regarding changes in coverage for proton pump inhibitors

How is coverage for acid reflux medication changing?

- Alberta government sponsored drug programs cover five different types of drugs in the proton pump inhibitor category which are used to treat acid reflux and, while these medications are equally effective, they vary in price.
- As of October 1, 2016, government will change the coverage provided for proton pump inhibitors. Coverage will still be provided, but government will only pay for the lowest cost proton pump inhibitors, which are the generic versions of Pariet (rabeprazole) and Tecta (pantoprazole magnesium).
- The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has established that all proton pump inhibitors are therapeutically similar and equally effective.

Why is coverage changing?

- We need to use our health dollars wisely and that means using clinical evidence to support prudent decisions in all areas, including what drugs we cover.
- Alberta is not the first province to introduce this type of pricing policy for proton pump inhibitors. Private insurers have also started to use this approach.

What are proton pump inhibitors and how are they used?

- Proton pump inhibitors are medications that keep the stomach from producing too much acid. They are used to treat gastroesophageal reflux disease and other acid-related disorders.

Does this policy apply to members of the low income plans, e.g. AISH, Income Support and AAHB?

- This change applies to all government sponsored drug plans.
- All patients will be provided with a four-month transition period, allowing time to adapt to the new drug.
- If a patient experiences a severe allergic reaction, the individual's physician can request an exception by contacting Alberta Blue Cross (ABC).
- If a request is submitted to the Health Benefits Exception Committee (HBEC) or AISH Health Benefits Exception Process (HBEP) it will be forwarded to ABC for a decision. The HBEC/HBEP will not be making decisions regarding these types of requests.
- If a patient wishes to continue using their current higher-cost proton pump inhibitor, they may do so but will be required to pay the cost difference.

Will patients need to see their physicians or their pharmacists to make this change?

- Each patient will need to work with their health provider to make this transition.

How can Albertans be sure that a lower cost medication will still be effective? What if the medication doesn't work for me?

- The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has established that all proton pump inhibitors are therapeutically similar and equally effective.
- Although this change becomes effective October 1, 2016, both existing and new patients will be given a four month transition period ending January 31, 2017. This transition period provides patients with an opportunity to discuss appropriate use with their physician and time to adapt to the new medication.
- If a patient wishes to continue using their current higher-cost proton pump inhibitor, they may do so but will be required to pay the cost difference.
- Also, if a patient experiences a severe allergic reaction, the individual's physician can request an exception by submitting a request to Alberta Blue Cross (ABC).
- If Albertans have questions about the change or the use of this medication, they are encouraged to speak with their physician or their pharmacist.

Why is the Alberta government telling Albertans which medications to use? Shouldn't medications be prescribed by a physician or a pharmacist?

- The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health has established that all proton pump inhibitors are therapeutically similar and equally effective.

- A physician or pharmacist may still prescribe a different proton pump inhibitor. The patient will just be required to pay the cost difference.

How many Albertans will be affected by this change?

- Last year, more than 194,000 Albertans accessed these drugs.

How much money will be saved as a result of this change?

- Government is expected to save approximately \$40 million over the next three years.

Is government putting the health of Albertans at risk simply to save money?

- We need to use our health dollars wisely, and that means using clinical evidence to support prudent decisions in all areas, including what drugs we cover.
- All patients will be provided with a four-month transition period, allowing time to adapt to the new drug.
- If a patient experiences a severe allergic reaction, the individual's physician can request an exception by submitting a request to Alberta Blue Cross (ABC)
- If a patient wishes to continue using their current higher-cost proton pump inhibitor, they may do so but will be required to pay the cost difference.
- Proton pump inhibitors are not intended for long-term use in most patients. Patients need to know that proton pump inhibitors should be used at the lowest possible dose and for the shortest time period.