

HCPC calls for greater healthcare savings through improved adherence to prescription drug regimens

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FALLS CHURCH, Va., June 22 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- With today's announcement that the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) has offered to voluntarily grant some \$80 billion in discounts to Medicare beneficiaries over the next decade in an effort to reduce overall healthcare costs, the Healthcare Compliance Packaging Council (HCPC) noted that far greater savings can be achieved if immediate steps are taken to help people take their prescription drugs properly.

Commonly referred to as pharmaceutical noncompliance, the end result of Americans not taking their prescription drugs properly is a well-documented phenomenon that drains more than \$180 billion from our national economy every year due to unnecessary emergency room visits, hospital stays, trips to the doctor, lost productivity, and early death.

"Published research points to several key reasons why people don't take their prescription drugs properly," notes HCPC Executive Director Peter G. Mayberry. "And one reason that is almost always on the top of the list is 'forgetfulness.'" A recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concludes, however, that better pharmaceutical packaging can significantly increase pharmaceutical compliance and improve healthcare outcomes.

The study - which was conducted by Ohio State University (OSU) and appears in the Jan/Feb 2008 edition of the Journal of the American Pharmacists Association - compared two groups of patients who were given the exact same drugs for high blood pressure in two different types of packaging: one group received their drugs in standard pharmacy vials, while the other group was given the exact same drug

in a unit dose blister card with compliance-prompting features.

After a year of tracking both groups, OSU researchers found that the group who received their drugs in blister packs with compliance-prompting features refilled their prescriptions in a much more timely manner and also achieved markedly better reductions in their blood pressure readings.

The OSU study is just one example of research which points to the role that unit dose formats can play in improving pharmaceutical compliance Mayberry points out. "In the United States today, the only class of drugs currently dispensed by manufacturers in a unit dose format with compliance-prompting features is birth control pills, and the most recent data shows that compliance rates with these drugs exceeds 92 percent. This can be compared with compliance rates for organ-rejection drugs - which are not typically dispensed in special packaging - that have a compliance rate of about 82 percent."

If better packaging can improve compliance by a mere 10 percent, Mayberry notes, annual savings should equal about \$18 billion. "Over ten years," he pointed out, "that is more than double what the PhRMA program seeks to achieve."

The HCPC is a not-for-profit trade association that was formed in 1990 to promote the many benefits of unit dose packaging. The United States is one of only a few countries in the world where pharmaceutical manufacturers are able to ship prescription drugs in bulk containers such that the drugs must be repackaged in the pharmacy before they can be given to consumers.

Bulk distribution of drug product adds unnecessary burdens to the pharmacy industry, allows drugs to be exposed to the atmosphere during repackaging and household use, promotes dispensing errors, and facilitates the introduction of counterfeit and/or expired drug products into legitimate dispensing chains. Greater use of unit dose packaging with compliance-prompting features by pharmaceutical

manufacturers in the U.S. would reduce overall healthcare costs by improving healthcare outcomes, while also improving the pharmaceutical supply chain, and providing U.S. consumers with greater piece of mind.

It is for all these reasons that the HCPC has launched an outreach effort to the Obama administration and the United States Congress urging public policy that will bring U.S. pharmaceutical packaging standards more closely in line with the standards pharmaceutical manufacturers must meet when they sell the exact same drugs in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

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