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## Expensive sleep drug draws attention, opportunity for collaboration

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Pharmacy Services watches closely for new high cost drugs in addition to price increases for existing drugs. Our partnership with physician organizations helps identify and implement solutions aimed at controlling drug costs, which contributes to sustainable premiums.

Xyrem<sup>®</sup> (sodium oxybate) has recently become a top contributor to overall drug spend at Blue Cross, although approved by the FDA 17 years ago in 2002. This drug is a central nervous system depressant indicated for the treatment of cataplexy or excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS) in patients 7 years of age and older with narcolepsy. To best understand what drives increasing drug spend, it's important to break down drug spending into its two components: price and use.

**Price** is the cost of each unit. In the case of Xyrem, price has increased over 300 percent since 2011. This means, a per patient cost that was previously \$40,000 is now over \$120,000! At the same time of Xyrem price increases, alternatives such as stimulants and wake-promoting agents have significantly decreased in price to less than \$100 per month.

**Use** is the number of prescriptions per member or the change in total days' supply of a medication. Despite having a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) and the most serious Boxed Warning from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for central nervous system depression, abuse and misuse, Blue Cross has seen a significant increase in the use and number of requests for Xyrem.

While there certainly are appropriate candidates that benefit from Xyrem, many have not had adequate trials of lower cost-alternatives and prescribers may not be aware of just how costly the drug has become in recent years relative to alternatives. This is where our physician partners, like Affinia Health Network, can make an impact on drug spending for members and Blue Cross. Affinia Health Network, led by their clinical pharmacist Tiffany Jenkins, developed an algorithm to support appropriate prescribing and use of Xyrem and alternatives:

During a routine network performance meeting with the Blues, it was brought to our attention that Xyrem was included in Affinia Health Network's list of "top 20 drugs" for total spend. This isn't a medication we would expect to be listed, given traditionally low utilization, but upon further internal investigation Affinia discovered a substantial annual spend nearing \$2 million for 19 patients, across multiple payers, for this one medication. In response, we identified the Xyrem prescribers from payer data and met to discuss utilization patterns and cost. We worked closely with Dr. Christopher Morgan on the Mercy Health Sleep Medicine team to develop a Xyrem Utilization algorithm to aid Affinia Health Network providers in medication selection for the management of Narcolepsy. We're continuing to educate our providers, discuss their prescribing patterns and share cost and utilization data in an effort to ensure clinically appropriate use while also attempting to lower network costs.

As Blue Cross continues to monitor drug pricing trends and identify opportunities, collaboration with our providers is necessary for promoting cost-effective drug therapy. Controlling drug spend saves our members money and is a significant contributor to keeping premiums at reasonable levels.

For questions, please email Jake Chaffee, Pharmacy Services, Blue Cross at [jchaffee@bcbsm.com](mailto:jchaffee@bcbsm.com).

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