POLICY & PRACTICE

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Avandia Litigation Is Underway

GlaxoSmithKline said that it is responding to a Department of Justice subpoena concerning the company's diabetes drug rosiglitazone (Avandia). In its 2010 third-quarter earnings announcement, GSK also said it has received "civil investigative demands from a number of states' attorneys general offices relating to the development and marketing of Avandia. … These enquiries are at an early stage, and GSK is cooperating with these offices." Meanwhile, the company said, litigation regarding rosiglitazone is still pending in both federal and state courts "and new cases continue to be filed." The Food and Drug Administration in September allowed rosiglitazone to remain on the market, but with new labeling and restrictions intended to limit its use to patients for whom other drugs do not work.

Monitor Market Is Growing

Three company's sales of continuous blood glucose systems reached close to $200 million in 2009, nearly double their sales of the year before, according to a market-research firm. In its latest report on the diagnostic testing industry, Kalorama Information said that the continuing-monitoring growth by the companies Medtronic, Dexcom, and Insulet should continue, given the increasing patient population and the building popularity of the devices. Fewer than 30% of type 1 diabetes patients in the United States currently using insulin pumps also have continuous blood glucose monitors, according to the report. Among type 2 U.S. diabetes patients using insulin pumps, fewer than 1 in 100 has a continuous monitor.

FDA Warns of Tainted Supplements

The FDA has reported a surge in the number of nutritional supplements tainted with active pharmaceutical ingredients, with more than one dozen recalled since the beginning of August. In the first three-quarters of 2010, the FDA recalled approximately 80 such products, a spokesperson said. The agency recently recalled three products marketed as testosterone boosters and hormone regulators that contained 6-Etioallochol-1,4-Diene-3,17-Dione, an aromatase inhibitor also known as ATD. "FDA has identified an emerging trend where over-the-counter products, frequently represented as dietary supplements, contain hidden active ingredients that could be harmful," the agency said in a statement.

Diabetes Harming Young Women

Diabetes-related hospitalizations for adults aged 30-39 doubled from 1993 to 2006, and young women were 1.3 times as likely to be hospitalized as were young men, even without counting pregnancy-related complications, according to a study in the Journal of Women's Health. A University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, team found that overall diabetes hospitalizations rose by two-thirds during those years, while inflation-adjusted costs for that care more than tripled, from around $62 billion to $200 billion. The authors said in a statement that more women may be hospitalized for diabetes because more of them are obese, compared with men in that same age group. It's also possible that women with diabetes may be sicker because they're less likely to receive preventive care.

Groups Open to New Iodine Rules

Current rules governing the use of radioactive iodine, which allow patients to return home quickly after being treated for thyroid cancer, are safe for patients, their families, and the public, according to a joint statement from the American Thyroid Association, the Endocrine Society, the Society of Nuclear Medicine, and the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists. The groups said they would support reexamining the issue if new data emerge indicating a potential threat to public safety. The American Thyroid Association is updating recommendations for management of these patients, the statement said. At a Nuclear Regulatory Commission hearing on the use of medical isotopes, Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) said there is a "strong likelihood that members of the public have been unwittingly exposed to radiation from patients who are discharged after being treated with radioisotopes." He blamed ineffective NRC regulation, guidance, and oversight for exposures.

—Jane Anderson