

Generics could save you money, but, at what cost?

In a short time you will find you are saving money on your prescription medicine, but be aware that it comes at a risk – generic drug manufacturers no longer have to warn consumers of the dangers that they learn about their drugs.

The cost of prescription medicines used by millions of people every day is about to plummet. The next 14 months will bring generic versions of seven of the world's 20 best-selling drugs as a result of expiring drug patents.

While brand-name drug companies are scrambling to adjust for the billions in revenue that will soon be lost, patients requiring prescription drugs will likely come out the financial winners.

It would be ridiculous to argue that this is a bad thing for most patients. Clearly, the financial benefit could be amazing. For instance, generic Protonix, used for severe heartburn, now costs just \$16 a month versus about \$170 per month for the brand name. Further, the cost of generics for the following drugs are expected to drop to below \$10 a month:

- Lipitor (currently retails at \$150/month),
- Plavix (currently retails at \$200/month), and
- Diovan (currently retails at \$125/month)

In addition to the financial benefit, doctors hope the lower price will increase the health of their patients overall. Currently, many patients need to make a cost/benefit analysis on a monthly basis because they are unable to afford the medications their doctor prescribed them. In theory, the number of patients jeopardizing their health because they can't afford medicines they need will be significantly reduced when the price of these medicines fall.

But, where there is gain for patients financially and in their overall health, it comes at a huge cost – these generic drugs are now less safe than the name brand version. Although these generic medicines are chemically equivalent to the original brand-name drug, they are not treated the same by the FDA thanks to a ruling last month by the U.S. Supreme Court, through Justice Thomas.

Does it make sense that with the projected increase of people on generic drugs, the Supreme Court of the United States, through Justice Thomas, would prevent victims of injuries from these same drugs from bringing failure to warn claims? That is exactly what the Supreme Court did.

Although Justice Thomas acknowledged this “unfairness” in the ruling last month, his condolences are not what patients need - Patients need protection.

Sources: Chron Business, Supreme Court Document