

A Cost Analysis on Generic and Brand-name Anti-depression Medications

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Extended Abstract

A mental disorder is characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour [1, 2]. In 2019, approximately one in every eight individuals around the world was affected by a mental disorder, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent conditions [3]. Currently, popular prescribed types of antidepressants include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) [4]. For such medications, affordability with reasonable cost is critically important alongside their availability for treating depression.

In my study, I conducted a quantitative assessment of the cost of generic medications and the corresponding brand names, as reported in the comprehensive CMS (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services) database, focusing on commonly used antidepressants. Our findings indicate that the total number of 30-day prescription fills has consistently increased every year since 2013, suggesting that the number of people with depression is rising every year including the pandemic period.

Alarming, the average cost per prescription fill (total cost divided by number of 30-day fills) for brand-name prescription drugs is significantly higher, ranging from 14 to 71 times more expensive, compared to their corresponding generic counterparts. For instance, Citalopram, a popular generic SSRI medication and the 31st most commonly prescribed medication in the United States in 2020 [5], costs only \$4.65 per fill in the range of 2013 to 2022. In contrast, the corresponding brand-name version, Celexa, marketed by Allergan, Inc., costs \$252.32 per fill during the same time period.

Moreover, the price gap between brand-name and generic drugs has considerably widened. While the cost of generic drugs has gradually decreased over the years, brand-name companies have been increasing their prices annually. In 2013, Celexa, as a brand-name drug, was approximately 25 times more expensive than the generic Citalopram medication. However, by 2020, Celexa costs around 78 times as much as the corresponding generic alternative. Clearly, the cost disparity between brand-name and generic drugs is growing and has become substantial.

These insights highlight the importance of monitoring and strengthening the nation's healthcare systems for individuals with psychiatric disorders. Administrators and policymakers could utilize this information to guide their efforts in providing affordable, high-quality care and improving overall health outcomes for those affected by mental health conditions.

References

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