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## Isn't Everybody Taking Anti-Depressants?

Anti-depressants – Zoloft, Prozac, Paxil, Effexor, and the like – are on many employers' top 10 most popular and expensive prescription drugs. As a nation, we spend \$7 billion on anti-depressants each year. Conventional wisdom would say that this is simply a result of modern-day stresses and wider acceptance of mental disorders.

- ✓ **Don't let conventional wisdom discourage you from working to reduce anti-depressant expenses. There are effective strategies.**

First, a bit of background.

- ✓ In a year, twenty percent of workers suffer this disorder.
- ✓ Depressed employees lose more than 2 days per month of productivity.
- ✓ Many (some experts estimate as much as two-thirds) depressed people do not seek care.
- ✓ Patients who do seek care are likely to get less than optimal care, such as taking drugs but not getting psychotherapy. These patients also tend to stay on the drugs longer than necessary, further adding to the cost without adding to the results.

**So, if depressed people are not getting enough treatment, who is taking all of those anti-depressants?** The answer: patients who have other conditions but not depression. One managed care organization found that **56% of its anti-depressant claims were for conditions that the drug is not approved to treat by the FDA.**

A recent study found that 77% of all anti-depressant prescriptions are written by primary care physicians. Studies show that general practitioners misdiagnose depression in nearly half of their patients. Thus, PCPs are more likely to give a patient anti-depressants when the patient is unhappy but not depressed – this is called a subsyndromal condition.

### **What can an employer do?**

- ✓ Educate employees about appropriate use of anti-depressants;
- ✓ Promote the plan's covered mental health services, so that patients get competent monitoring for anti-depressants;

- ✓ Ask the prescription benefit manager to notify you when an anti-depressant becomes available as a generic and let employees know how much money they could save by “going generic;”
- ✓ Find out what the provider network does to monitor prescription and diagnosis patterns. If the answer is not satisfactory, consider a different network; and,
- ✓ Require prior authorization for anti-depressants after the first 90-day fill.

Knowing more about health care costs means that you and your clients can effectively act to reduce costs. Call us any time for more ideas!

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