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FOLLOWING 12,400% PRICE HIKE IN DRUG USED TO TREAT GOUT, BROWN URGES COMPANY TO RETHINK DECISION, CALLS ON CMS TO INVESTIGATE RAMIFICATIONS

Drug Was Hiked From As Little As 4 Cents per Pill to \$5 per Pill; For Average Gout Sufferer, Monthly Cost Has Soared From \$2.40/Month to \$300/Month or More

Approximately 3 Million Americans—Primarily Senior Citizens—Suffer From Gout; Company Stands to Sell \$11 Billion Worth of Medication in First Year Alone

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Following a 12,400 percent price hike for a gout treatment drug known as colchicine, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) today sent a letter to the drug’s manufacturer—URL Pharma—urging the company to rethink its decision to hike the price from as little as four cents per pill to \$5 per pill. Brown also sent a letter to Dr. Donald Berwick, acting director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), asking him to investigate the ramifications of URL Pharma’s massive price increase of the drug, sold under the brand name Colcrys. Three million Americans—primarily senior citizens—use colchicine to treat their gout.

According to the American College of Rheumatology, colchicine has been used for more than 200 years as an inexpensive pain-reliever and anti-inflammatory. Prior to FDA approval of Colcrys, 21 firms—including URL Pharma—were manufacturing oral colchicine and selling it for as little as 4 cents per pill. After URL Pharma received FDA approval and acquired exclusive rights to produce and sell colchicine, the price spiked to \$5.00 a pill. According to doctors with the ACR, the standard regimen for an individual with gout is two pills a day—while the sufferer is not experiencing a gout flare-up—and more during a flare-up. At an average of two pills a day for the three million Americans with gout, URL Pharma would sell nearly \$11 billion worth of medication in the first year alone.

“Yet again, a pharmaceutical company is taking advantage of FDA approval to price-gouge their customers and pad their profits. Because most Americans living with gout are seniors—and the average Social Security recipient receives just around \$14,000 per year—a price hike to more than \$3,500 per year will break the budgets of so many who depend on this drug. URL Pharma should do the right thing and put patients over their profits—particularly since their patients are those who can least afford a colossal price increase.

“Furthermore, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services need to investigate this cost hike. With more than 3 million Americans suffering from gout, the price hike for colchicine will no doubt have a significant impact on Medicare,” Brown continued.

Brown has been an outspoken critic of companies that exploit the FDA approval process. Following an even more egregious case involving a drug used to prevent pre-term labor – known as 17P and branded as Makena—Brown intervened by contacting the company and the FDA. Following Brown’s intervention, the company decreased the price and the FDA agreed to allow safe and more affordable versions of the medicine to be manufactured.

“My overarching concern with this price increase is that this seems to be a new model for drug companies,” Brown wrote in the letter to CMS. “As we saw recently with the drug Makena, companies are cherry-picking medications and treatments that have been widely used but have not gone through the FDA approval process. URL Pharma, KV Pharmaceutical, and others are taking these medications through the approval process with minimal investment and are reaping disproportionate rewards for their work.”

Brown’s letters to URL Pharma and CMS can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#), respectively.

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