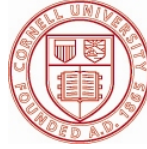


# CASE STUDIES IN PART D

Volume 2 Number 5



Cornell University  
College of Human Ecology

## CUR<sub>x</sub>ED

Cornell University Resource Education for Medicare Part D

### DOING THE SPLITS

#### THE CASE

Betty is a volunteer counselor who works at her local community Office for the Aging, assisting Medicare beneficiaries with their Part D concerns. She is a former nurse, now retired, and has an understanding of people's medical conditions as well as their healthcare insurance needs

Betty has been working with a client, LG, who has multiple medical problems and is on many expensive medications. LG strives to adhere to the care instructions provided by his medical providers but is finding that the high costs of his medications are becoming an increasing burden, especially in light of the rising costs of other items such as gasoline and groceries.

LG has a Medicare Part D stand alone prescription drug plan. His current medication regimen costs him approximately \$4245 per year, including the annual premium.

The medications that LG is taking include:

- Coumadin 5mg daily
- EC Naprosyn 375mg twice a day
- Procardia XL 30mg daily
- Atenolol 50 mg daily
- Zolpidem 5mg at bedtime as needed
- Sertraline 50mg at bedtime
- Aricept 5mg daily
- Lipitor 40mg daily

A previous issue of *Case Studies in Part D* raised Betty's awareness of the potential for splitting tablets in order to save money on prescription medications. Because of her background in nursing, Betty is aware that several of the medications which LG takes are in tablet form and available in higher dosage strengths. She thinks it might be a good idea for LG to look into splitting tablets.

#### Part D Trivia Question

Which medication had the highest amount of total sales in 2007?

- A. Fosamax
- B. Lipitor
- C. Nexium
- D. Plavix
- E. Prozac

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**WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

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## THE STUDY

The first thing which Betty should advise LG to do is to check with his Pharmacist. While many tablets are appropriate for splitting, not all of them may be safely cut in half. A Pharmacist should be consulted for advise for each medication.

In order to ensure that he is taking the correct dosage after the tablets are cut in half, LG must first get tablets that are double the strength. This will require new prescriptions from LG's doctors.

Some medications have a very narrow range of therapeutic effectiveness. Outside of this range, medications may be ineffective (if the dose is low) or they may be toxic (if the dose is high). Coumadin is one such medication where the margin of safety is very small and very critical. While breaking tablets in half is acceptable for most medications, it does not always split the tablet exactly in half. With Coumadin, this margin of error is not acceptable and these tablets should not be split.

Many tablets have a coating on them to protect the lining of the stomach from the potentially irritating effects of some medications. EC Naprosyn is an example of such a medication. Breaking the tablet in half disrupts the integrity of the barrier provided by the coating. Subsequently, the patient may experience some gastrointestinal upset when taking a coated tablet that is split.

Some medications are designed to release their active ingredients slowly over a designated period of time. This accomplished trough different types of tablet designs. The Procardia XL tablet has a very small, laser driven hole in it which opens to a reservoir of the drug contained within the core of the tablet. Cutting such a tablet in half would defeat the design features of tablet to release the medication slowly and potentially expose the patient to harmful effects. Many slow release, or extended release products, but should not be split.

LG's remaining medications, Atenolol, Zolpidem, Sertraline, Aricept, and Lipitor, may all be safely split and taken if LG obtains pills that are double the strength. Doing this will provide LG with an annual savings of about \$1644, or about 39%.

Always check with a Pharmacist before splitting tablets in half. While this can be a creative way to save money on prescription drug costs, this is not a strategy which is appropriate for all medications and requires the oversight of healthcare professionals.

### Part D Trivia Answer

According to *Drug Topics* magazine, **Lipitor** was the number one selling prescription medication in 2007. The number one selling generic product was Hydrocodone with acetaminophen.

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