



Excellus touts generics as cost-savers

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In the time it takes to ask whether a generic is available and appropriate, you could save a ton on your medications.

“In 15 seconds or less, you can save hundreds over a year,” said Dr. Joel Owerbach, vice president and chief pharmacy officer for Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, sounding a lot like a popular ad for another kind of insurance.

Tuesday, Excellus released a list of 28 medications scheduled to come off patent and be available in generic versions this year or next. The 2010 list includes Flomax for enlarged prostate and Aricept for Alzheimer’s disease, and the 2011 list includes Tricor and Lipitor for cholesterol.

In the complicated and political world of health care, Owerbach said that the use of generics is one way that individuals and the community can control costs.

Excellus has released such a list for the past several years. Over that time, and with a concerted effort from the **Rochester Business Alliance Healthcare Initiative**, physicians, hospitals and others in health care to promote generics, their use has increased. Excellus has seen generics go from 55.6 percent of all prescriptions filled in the Finger Lakes region in 2005 to 71.4 percent in 2008. The regional savings in 2008 was estimated at \$68 million and the savings in the 39-county upstate area was estimated at \$369 million.

MVP Health Care also reported increases in the use of generics with the rate at 72.9 percent for its commercial products and 71.3 percent for Gold Medicare Advantage in a 10-county Rochester area.

There may be instances when a generic is not the best choice, but Owerbach said it’s always worth asking.

While money is one issue, the use of generics also may lead to better health. “People may be able to fill their prescriptions more consistently and have better adherence,” Owerbach said.