

## **Oklahoma Pharmacists Seek More Transparency in Generic Prescription Drug Pricing, Payments**

By B. Douglas Hoey, RPh, MBA

The cost of medications for both small town Oklahoma pharmacies and the citizens they serve continues to skyrocket as out-of-state Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) corporations make multi-billion dollar profits. Bipartisan legislation (S.B. 1150) pending this session would bring greater transparency to the prescription drug pricing and reimbursement process to benefit Oklahoma patients and locally owned community pharmacies.

Two years ago Oklahoma enacted a law providing for reasonable transparency into how generic medications are priced and reported. The bill became law despite misleading claims by PBMs that it would increase costs to the system. Unfortunately, the PBM corporations have effectively thumbed their noses at Oklahoma's Governor and Legislature and ignored that law.

Oklahoma's independent pharmacists have been squeezed by the PBMs' altering pharmacy contract terms, reimbursing them less for medications, and redefining what pricing benchmarks are utilized to reimburse pharmacies for their services. The simple call for transparency was met with corporate PBM retaliation ultimately endangering Oklahoma's small business owners. Today Oklahoma community pharmacists are back at the state Capitol respectfully requesting that the legislature take measures to close the loopholes in the current law in the form of S.B. 1150. This bill takes needed steps to ensure a transparent and sustainable medication delivery system.

Time and again these out-of-state PBMs oppose small business-friendly legislation in Oklahoma, with their claims that any transparency will result in cost increases to the system. When these baseless scare tactics prove to be successful the only result is that Oklahoma small businesses make less, the cost of medication for patients increases, yet the PBMs continue to record multi-billion dollar profits. The largest PBM is currently being sued for nearly \$15 billion from its largest client claiming that the PBM pocketed available savings, rather than passing them on. Nevertheless the PBMs are in Oklahoma opposing the transparency provisions contained within S.B. 1150 claiming that it is the small business pharmacies of Oklahoma causing cost increases!

Community pharmacy's position is fair and simple -- health care costs should be transparent and easily understood by all those involved with the delivery of prescription drugs, including the providers and patients they serve. In today's marketplace, pricing is a closely kept secret known only to the PBM corporations that actually set the cost and reimbursement for medications, define what pharmacies can serve a beneficiary, and simultaneously profit from this relationship. It is a one-sided system favoring a few Fortune 50, multi-billion dollar, unregulated PBM corporations.

Pharmacists in Oklahoma call upon the citizens of the state and their elected officials to recognize that the unfounded claims by the PBMs are simply false. If one of the nation's largest insurers has now sued the nation's largest PBM for nearly \$15 billion, how can the interests of the state's small business health care providers and the patients they serve be protected against such corporate giants?

Pharmacists are calling upon you as citizens and your elected officials to support S.B. 1150. We encourage you to contact your local, independent community pharmacist and have them explain the reality of the situation.

*Mr. Hoey is CEO of the National Community Pharmacists Association, which represents more than 22,000 independent community pharmacies, including 464 in Oklahoma.*