New Unique-Acting Insomnia Treatment: Belsomra®

Background:
On August 13, 2014, Merck, Sharpe & Dohme Corp announced that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had approved Merck’s new insomnia medication, Belsomra® (pronounced bell-SOM-rah). As an orexin (an awake chemical) receptor blocker, Belsomra® (suvorexant) is being marketed by Merck as improving a person's ability to fall asleep in a different way from current agents for insomnia. The FDA has approved Belsomra® in four different strengths--5, 10, 15 and 20 milligrams. Belsomra® should be taken within 30 minutes of going to bed with at least 7 hours of planned sleep time, and should not be taken more than once per night. The total daily dose of Belsomra® should not exceed 20 mg per day due to the risks that it can impair next day alertness and driving performance. There are no comparison trials of Belsomra® against currently available insomnia treatments, such as Ambien® (zolpidem) or Lunesta® (eszopiclone). As a result, it is unknown if there are any differences in safety or effectiveness between Belsomra® and other insomnia treatments.1

Our Stance and Impact to You
Insomnia medications were among the top 10 drugs by spend and utilization for both mature and developing claims within Healthcare Solutions’ book of business in 2013. Many of the agents that treat insomnia are now available as the generic formulation and are expected to be more cost-effective than Belsomra®. The anticipated release date is late 2014 or early 2015, but information regarding pricing of this agent was not available at the time of publication.3 The final drug schedule classification for Belsomra® is currently under review by the Drug Enforcement Administration, which has proposed that Belsomra® be marketed as a Schedule IV controlled substance with limited abuse potential, similar to zolpidem and eszopiclone. As information comparing Belsomra® and existing insomnia treatments is not available at this time, this medication will require a prior authorization (PA) on Healthcare Solutions’ client formularies.

For questions regarding this eAlert or to learn more about our Clinical Rx Services please contact your dedicated Account Executive.

Sources

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