Background
Drugs used to treat insomnia (trouble falling asleep or staying asleep), are available by prescription and over the counter. They are generally taken at night before bedtime, and they work by causing drowsiness or sleepiness. Even after a good night’s sleep when these drugs have been taken, drowsiness and problems with staying alert may last into the next morning. This can make it more dangerous to perform tasks that require a person to be alert, such as driving a car, and is a risk with all drugs used to help a person sleep.

Women may have more of a problem with this than men; as it may take longer for medications to leave the woman’s body than from a man’s. Using lower doses of these drugs means there should be less drug in the body the next morning; this should reduce the chance of having problems with being alert the next day.

Actions by the FDA
The FDA is requiring that the manufacturers of the following sleep drugs; Ambien, Ambien CR, Edular, and Zolpimist (all contain the active drug zolpidem) to lower the dose for women. The dose for women should be lowered from 10 milligrams (mg) at bedtime to 5 mg at bedtime for short-acting drugs, and from 12.5mg to 6.25mg for long-acting drugs. Claimants who have a prescription for a zolpidem sleep drug should take it as directed by the doctor and discuss the need for a lower dose.

Our Stance/Impact
We expect to see a lower dose of zolpidem in the female workers compensation (WC) population with the FDA requirement. In the WC population, a decrease in a dose could also mean less side effects and fewer drug Interactions, which could result in overall cost savings for payers. However, we do not expect any cost savings specific to these drugs. In general, a lower dose doesn’t mean that the drug is less costly since manufacturers will likely change pricing based on changes to the market. It may take longer to see women move to a lower dose as both the doctor and female claimant need to agree to the change.

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

Sources