Express Scripts to Reconsider Gilead Sciences' Hepatitis C Cures

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Express Scripts, the largest pharmacy benefits manager in the United States, has officially removed Gilead Sciences' hepatitis C virus (HCV) drug Harvoni (ledipasvir/sofosbuvir) from its list of formulary exclusions and is now reviewing whether or not to add the company's latest HCV treatments to its coverage plans in 2017, Bloomberg reports.

The move may reverse an exclusive deal signed between rival hepatitis C drugmaker AbbVie Inc. and Express Scripts in 2014, which favored the company's Viekira Pak (ombitasvir, paritaprevir, ritonavir) treatment over all other HCV cures. Doing so helped AbbVie get a major foothold in the U.S. market despite having a less convenient regimen than Gilead.

According to a document published earlier this week, Express Scripts will also be reviewing Epclusa (sofosbuvir/velpatasvir), Gilead's most recently approved hepatitis C treatment, in negotiations over the next year. The pharmacy benefits manager said it would continue to exclude Merck's new hepatitis C treatment Zepatier and Gilead's older HCV drug Sovaldi from its formularies.

While Express Scripts has not yet made an official decision, industry experts say approving Gilead's treatments could help reverse declining sales of the company's hepatitis C drugs. Recent financial reports show shares of the California-based drug company have slid 20 percent this year, despite it raking in nearly $1.47 billion from Harvoni sales and $775 million from Sovaldi sales in the second quarter of this U.S. fiscal year alone.

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