U.S. Congress Meets Again to Discuss Hepatitis C Drug Pricing

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The U.S. Senate recently held another special meeting to look into the high costs of hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, the Fiscal Times reports. The question at hand this time was how far the government should go to try to influence pharmaceutical costs, without discouraging drug research and development.

Gilead Sciences currently sells Sovaldi (sofosbuvir) and Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir) — two new and highly effective 12-week cures for hep C — at $84,000 and $94,500, respectively.

That works out to about $1,000 per pill for Sovaldi and $1,125 per pill for Harvoni — a price many consumers, insurers and governments around the world claim is too high.

Gilead claims that their pricing is fair, considering how much money they spent developing the pill. The company also argues that government pricing plans could inhibit future research and development of drugs. Even at their current price, the company argues the drugs will help save money in the long run by preventing complications from HCV, such as transplants and cancer treatments.

Advocacy groups are proposing that the U.S. government offer a licensing agreement for generic producers to manufacture and sell Sovaldi at a lower cost. Another approach would be to force Gilead to let others use their drug patents under a “non-voluntary acquisition.”

Federal law does give the government the right to appropriate inventions while providing reasonable compensation to the patent holder. So far, that law has never been extended to the pharmaceutical industry.

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