

## Big Savings Available With New Generic Drugs

*By Stanton R. Mehr*

Today, consumers like yourself have great opportunities to save money on medications. Some of the most widely prescribed (and often quite expensive) prescription drugs are offered as generic drugs. These generic drugs are usually available at a fraction of the cost of the original, brand-name version. The really good news is that even more well-known medications are going to be introduced as generics in coming years, with the opportunity to save you more money.

These generic drugs contain the exact same medicine as the brand-name product. They're usually marketed under their chemical name, rather than a brand name. For example, a generic version of Merck's popular anti-cholesterol drug, Zocor<sup>®</sup>, was introduced last year. Not only is simvastatin, the generic version, just as safe and effective as Zocor<sup>®</sup>, it will also be much less expensive than the brand-name drug. When multiple companies produce generic versions of a drug like Zocor<sup>®</sup>, the extra competition tends to drive down the price even more.

Your insurance plan likely has a lower copayment for generic medications. If you were paying \$30 each time you had a Zocor<sup>®</sup> prescription refilled, you may only pay \$10 or \$15 for generic simvastatin.

This affects not only the price you pay at the pharmacy but the price paid by our entire health system. When the anti-depressant Prozac<sup>®</sup> became available in a generic version, its price dropped by more than 70 percent, saving the U.S. health system millions of dollars. When added to other recent generic-drug introductions, like that for the anti-allergy drug Claritin<sup>®</sup> or the acid-reducing medication Prilosec<sup>®</sup>, the savings to the many patients who need these medications on a daily basis become enormous—and that helps us all.

Generic drugs become available when the patents or copyrights on the brand-name drug expire. Like any product that is manufactured, the company that invented it holds the patent, which expires after a set amount of time (17 years for drug products). Over the next few years, patents on some of the most commonly used brand-name drugs, such as the anti-cholesterol drug Lipitor<sup>®</sup>, the single most widely prescribed medication in the world, are set to expire, opening the floodgates for generic versions.

With healthcare costs rising each year, this is great news. When you visit your pharmacy, be sure to ask the pharmacist "Is there a generic drug available for my prescription?"

<b>Name of Generic</b>	<b>Name of Brand</b>	<b>Medicine Type</b>
Carvediolol	Coreg <sup>®</sup>	Antihypertensive/ heart medicine
Sertraline	Zoloft <sup>®</sup>	Antidepressant
Oxybutinyn ER	Ditropan XL <sup>®</sup>	Urinary Incontinence
Paroxitene	Paxil <sup>®</sup>	Antidepressant
Rabiprazole	AcipHex <sup>®</sup>	Acid reducer