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Pharma companies offer NHS 'cash-back' on smoking cessation products

Thursday , November 21, 2002

Leading pharmaceutical companies in the smoking cessation market have struck a groundbreaking deal with the Government to offer 'cash-back' to the NHS to encourage uptake of the products.

Novartis Consumer Healthcare, Pharmacia, GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Health and GlaxoSmithKline are all participating in the new rebate scheme for local health economies, which has been launched as a part of a new Government anti-smoking campaign.

The scheme will give PCTs rebates on smoking cessation products sold above an as yet unannounced threshold, intended to allow local health services to invest more in the products.

The smoking cessation market, which spans OTC and prescription sales, is already booming, with the four big players all marketing versions of nicotine replacement therapy in a variety of different drug delivery formulations.

Sales of GSK's prescription drug Zyban have, however, suffered after it was linked to a number of seizure-related deaths earlier this year.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn unveiled the Government's new anti-smoking campaign as one strand of a five-point public health strategy.

"The time has come to put renewed emphasis on prevention as well as cure so that we develop in our country health services and not just sickness services", he said. "It is time for a sea change in attitudes. A renewed determination to fulfil the ambition we should share as a nation: to improve the health of all and to improve the health of the poorest, fastest".

Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation will receive £15 million of Government money over the next three years to lead new hard-hitting, anti-smoking campaigns, while cigarette packets will carry bigger, more stark health warnings.

The five-point plan

Tackling inequalities in access to health services

A new funding formula will be introduced for local health services later this year to balance out what the Government calls "high cost areas" and "high need areas".

Greater emphasis on public health and health equality in the NHS

The next NHS performance ratings will take into consideration local efforts to promote better public health and health outcomes. New ratings for infant mortality, and mortality from circulatory diseases and cancers are being considered to augment existing local measurements of smoking cessation services, screening and immunisation. A new Health Inequalities Unit will be created at the DoH.

Continuing focus on cancer and coronary heart disease

The DoH says a renewed emphasis on preventative measures will go alongside maintained improvements on waiting times and prescribing of new drugs.

Ensuring a better balance between prevention and treatment

One aim the DoH has not yet elaborated on possibly hinting at targeting costly and unnecessary interventions, including drugs, where preventative measures would reduce costs and improve public health.

Tackling smoking

The DoH says it is now determined to help more smokers quit and to prevent more young people from taking up the habit in the first place. Smoking-related diseases kill around 120,000 people every year in the UK, and costs the NHS £1.7 billion annually.

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