ACR Commends Growing Chorus of U.S. House and Senate Leaders Working to Lower Specialty Drug Costs

ATLANTA – The American College of Rheumatology today praised Senate Finance Committee ranking member Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), House Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX), and E&C Health Subcommittee ranking member Rep. Gene Greene (D-TX), for their leadership in advancing policies that will help to lower the cost of specialty drugs.

“We applaud Sen. Wyden and Reps. Burgess and Greene for supporting efforts that will help to lower the cost of high-priced specialty drugs like biologic therapies,” said Sharad Lakhanpal, MBBS, MD, president of the ACR. “Controlling specialty drug costs is critical to ensure Americans living with rheumatologic diseases can access and afford life-saving therapies that help them manage pain, avoid long-term disability, and remain active in the workforce.”

The ACR commended Sen. Wyden for introducing the Creating Transparency to Have Drug Rebates Unlocked (C-THRU) Act, a bill that would increase transparency among Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs), which act as intermediaries between drug manufacturers, pharmacies and insurers. The legislation would require PBMs to disclose the rebates they receive from drugmakers, and how much of that savings is passed on to the consumer.

“The ACR supports increased transparency in how pharmaceutical companies, PBMs, and health insurance companies determine the cost of specialty drugs, including the biologic therapies used to treat rheumatologic diseases,” continued Dr. Lakhanpal. “The C-THRU Act is an important first step to hold PBMs accountable for their pricing practices and to eliminate any questionable incentives that may contribute to rising specialty drug costs.”

The ACR also applauded Reps. Burgess and Greene for raising the issue of inadequate FDA staffing levels for biosimilar drug review, a concern recently voiced by Dr. Angus Worthing, a practicing rheumatologist and chair of the ACR’s Government Affairs Committee, in a Feb. 23 Morning Consult op-ed.

Speaking at a March 2 Energy & Commerce hearing on reauthorization of the Biosimilar User Fee Act (BsUFA), Rep. Greene said:
“FDA must have a...sufficiently sized workforce to make timely scientific decisions in the interest of patients and the public health. Currently FDA has 1,000 vacancies at the agency and the majority of which are in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. We worked to help the agency attract and hire highly qualified professionals in the 21st Century Cures Act. The hiring freeze threatens the laudable work that could have a detrimental on the hiring goals...already negotiated performance goals of the user fee agreements.”

Speaking at a March 15 biosimilars briefing hosted by *The Atlantic*, Rep. Burgess said that the subcommittee would be looking “quite intensely” at FDA staffing levels for biosimilars review, and called for faster FDA review and approval of biosimilars.

“The ACR commends Reps. Greene and Burgess for recognizing the importance of adequate FDA staffing for biosimilar drug review,” said Lakhanpal. “The safe and effective introduction of additional biosimilars to the drug marketplace will help drive down the costs of specialty drugs and increase our patients’ access to safe and proven therapies.

“We will continue to work with Congressional leaders to address systemic issues related to specialty drug costs and to advance policies that promote patient access to biologic therapies.”

The ACR recently released its 2017 Health Policy Statements, which include several policy recommendations for reducing the cost of specialty drugs and increasing patient access to specialty therapies. The policy statements can be found [here](#).

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The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) is the nation's leading advocacy organization for the rheumatology care community, representing more than 9,500 rheumatologists and rheumatology health professionals. As an ethically driven, professional membership organization committed to improving healthcare for Americans living with rheumatologic diseases, the ACR advocates for high-quality, high-value policies and reforms that will ensure safe, effective, affordable and accessible rheumatology care.