

Impeding U.S. generic drug use criticized

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Moves by branded drug companies to slow the spread of U.S. generic drugs has been criticized by a pharmacy benefit managers' organization.

"There's an agenda to prevent generics from getting to the market as soon as they could," said Mark Merritt, president of the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association.

There are an unprecedented number of top-selling drugs scheduled to go off patent within five years, and the organization said branded drug companies are creating hurdles to potential savings of \$23 billion to seniors and the Medicare system.

The association identified 14 drugs commonly used by older people that are set to go off patent by 2010, including the cholesterol drugs Zocor and Pravachol, the antidepressant Zoloft and the prostate medication Proscar.

Under federal legislation passed in 1984, drug makers have 20 years after discovery of a drug to sell it exclusively, but some drug companies are lobbying for longer patent exclusivity.

"Many of the branded companies have pretty empty pipelines, with few big blockbusters on the horizon," Merritt said. "So they're fighting to keep their current big sellers free of competition."

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