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Illinois and Wisconsin launch pioneer prescription drug importation program: I-SaveRx

On October 4, 2004, the Governors of Illinois and Wisconsin announced the launch of a prescription drug importation program which is the first in the nation to allow residents to purchase lower-cost prescription drugs from Europe and Canada. Although a number of states have provided web sites linking users directly to mail-order pharmacies in Canada, the I-SaveRx program is the first program to offer network pharmacies in Europe as well.

The program, called I-SaveRx, is expected to provide the 18 million residents of the two states with access to lower-priced prescription drugs through a network of 45 pharmacies and wholesalers in Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Under I-SaveRX participants are expected to save an average of 25 to 50 percent on the cost of the most common medications to treat chronic conditions. I-SaveRx users will be provided with a list of the program's medications, prices in each of the three countries and enrollment forms and guidance. New enrollees are required to mail or fax a completed health profile form and signed prescription to a clearinghouse, which then conducts an initial scan for appropriateness, using the same drug interaction software used in Illinois pharmacies. Prescriptions that pass the interaction test are then turned over to a network physician in the country from which the medication will be dispensed, who reviews and re-writes the prescription for a local network pharmacy, which performs a final safety check before dispensing. Additional safeguards include the list of available drugs to those that are used for long periods of time and cannot spoil during shipping. Also, network pharmacies can dispense only drugs that are intended as domestic product in Canada, Ireland and United Kingdom, prohibiting the dispensing of drugs from countries that are not part of the I-SaveRx program.

Although anyone in Illinois and Wisconsin are eligible to enroll in I-SaveRx, initial promotional efforts are aimed at the estimated 4 million people without prescription drug coverage in those states.

For more information about the new program or other health care issues, please contact Karen Harris or Deborah Gordon, members of the firm's Health Care Practice Group in the Chicago office. Karen Harris is at 312-269-8931, kharris@seyfarth.com; Deborah Gordon is at 312-781-8620, dgordon@seyfarth.com.