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Consider Vaccine Cost-Effectiveness

Although competition usually lowers cost in the marketplace, the same phenomenon generally isn’t seen when new vaccine competitors enter the market. Rather, the major companies with competing vaccines make combination products with ingredients that differ from others so that staying within their family of products is more convenient than switching between companies.

Moreover, companies also provide price advantages to physicians through national buying groups that provide bigger discounts to those who purchase vaccines within their own family of products. This impacts any price reduction that might occur with brand competition.

So what should we draw the line? At one point or another, ACIP may have to say the government can’t afford to pay for vaccines that do not have a strong cost-benefit argument behind them. Yes, the alternative is a two-tiered system where those who can afford the vaccine can get it, and those who can’t, don’t. ACIP has tried to avoid that scenario in the past, but I fear it won’t be able to do so much longer.

Dr. Pichichero, a specialist in pediatric infectious diseases, is director of the Rochester (N.Y.) General Research Institute. In addition to the disclosures mentioned in this column, Dr. Pichichero noted that he also receives consulting fees from Novartis and holds research grants from Merck, GSK, Novartis, and Wyeth (now part of Pfizer).

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