

## **New Medicare Demonstration Project May Help Cover MS Therapy Costs For Eligible Beneficiaries (5/26/04)**

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) reported that a Medicare demonstration project starting this summer will cover disease-modifying therapies taken at home for several thousand beneficiaries with multiple sclerosis.

According to the NMSS, the project will cover Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.'s COPAXONE<sup>®</sup> (glatiramer acetate injection), Serono Inc. and Pfizer Inc.'s Rebif<sup>®</sup> (interferon beta-1a), Berlex Inc.'s Betaseron<sup>®</sup> (interferon beta-1b) and Biogen Idec Inc.'s Avonex<sup>®</sup> (interferon beta-1a).

Through the project, Medicare should cover approximately 70 percent of the drug cost over the course of a year, and assistance will likely be available for patients with financial need. However, the NMSS noted that a lottery system may be used to select people for the coverage.

"Competition is expected to be stiff, as only 50,000 people with several different diseases will be enrolled and expenditures are capped at \$500 million," the society reported.

The NMSS is instructing staff at its chapters to gather information on all clients who may be interested in the project in order to quickly inform those who are eligible once more information becomes available.

Individuals who may be eligible "include Medicare beneficiaries who have no alternate coverage for their injected MS therapies, inadequate coverage or coverage that could be dropped."

Other potential candidates include those "who are now covered for Avonex<sup>®</sup> in a physician's office (as currently provided under Medicare) but who would prefer to receive their injections outside of a physician office setting."

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