

CAPITAL TIMES

MADISON, WI

MONDAY 19, 983

MAY 2 2005

State's RX program casts wider net

State government saved \$25 million with its employee prescription drug program in 2004, and a program linked to it is now open to any resident of Wisconsin.

It's attracting national attention from organizations like the United Auto Workers, and it could divert the longtime focus on whether Americans can buy prescription drugs from Canada.

More than 3,200 people signed up for BadgerRx Gold in its first two weeks, and that's more than was projected for the entire first month, according to officials. There is no age requirement and there is no screening for pre-existing conditions.

Who stands to benefit the most? Navitus Health Solutions, which manages the program, answers this way:

"If you don't have health insurance; or your health insurance doesn't in-

Matt Pommer
CAPITOL WATCH



clude a prescription drug benefit; or if you're in a plan that has high coinsurance or doesn't cover the medicines you need."

More than 150,000 people, including dependents, get their health insurance coverage through the state employee health insurance program. That's a lot of buying power and pro-

vides financial muscle when it comes to negotiating with pharmacies and drug companies. Often there are competing drugs that provide the same help to patients.

Navitus estimates a person might be able to save between 25 and 40 percent on the cost of drugs thanks to negotiated lower prices, pharmacy discounts, and rebates from manufacturers. Many drug discount cards don't directly provide the rebates to the purchasers, according to officials.

A team of pharmacists and physicians created the list of covered medications, and the list of covered drugs is on the BadgerRx Gold website — www.badgerxgold.com. Enrollment forms are also available through the website.

The program isn't free. The annual enrollment fee is \$25 per person up to a maximum of \$75 for a family of three. There is a \$5 discount from the

total fee if registration is done on line. Signups also are available by phone, mail or fax. The toll free telephone number is 866-809-9382.

Part of the potential savings comes from the potential alternatives offered by the doctor-pharmacy team. One example given is a 55-year-old with high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

The person had been taking Avapro and Pravachol with an annual cost of \$2,716.92. A suggested alternative is Cozaar and Lovastatin, and the annual savings is estimated at \$1,505.40 or about 55 percent of the initial cost.

The savings in 2004 spurred state government to build on it to help individual residents who are facing high drug costs with little or no insurance, according to Tom Korpady, administrator of the state employee health insurance program.

"It's not the cheapest for everyone," Korpady warns. Some pharma-

cists may have lower prices on certain drugs, either through the size of their purchases from manufacturers or as a "loss leader" to get customers to come into their stores.

Next year the federal government will launch a drug program as part of Medicare, and its savings for senior citizens likely will be greater, according to Korpady.

Navitus promises the doctor-pharmacist committee will be continuously reviewing the list of drugs, including the latest clinical savings. "The prescription drugs included in the program for discount are the most effective and safe medications available," the company promises.

The benefit for state government? The bigger the buying total, the more economic muscle the state has in dealing with drug manufacturers who have long had their own way in the market place.