



April 15, 2008

WellPoint Rolls Out Plans for Rx Drug Surveillance System



WellPoint **announced plans** today to work with FDA and launch one of the first real-time medication surveillance systems, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. With 35 million members, WellPoint is the largest insurer by membership in the U.S.

Under the system, WellPoint will scan medical claims and medication use data for more than half of its members in hopes of identifying possible safety issues with specific treatments or combinations of treatments.

A Help to FDA

A law enacted last year requires FDA to establish a computerized network to scan public and private health insurance and pharmacy records for safety issues with new medications.

FDA plans to partner with WellPoint, UnitedHealth Group and other large health insurers to tap into databases they have already developed, rather than build its own.

Janet Woodcock, director of the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research at FDA, said, "We're bringing together all these different groups in a network so that we can ask them to look at the same questions at the same time." In addition to WellPoint, Woodcock said that FDA will "need to partner with a lot of groups because they'll represent different populations" (Fuhrmans, *Wall Street Journal*, 4/15).

Marcus Wilson -- president of HealthCore, the unit of WellPoint that is developing the database -- said the company is working out details for how it will share information with FDA, drug makers, physicians and members (Berkrot, *Reuters*, 4/15).

Insurer Benefits

WellPoint and other insurers with similar systems use algorithms and computer modeling to identify increases in symptoms related to use of a particular medication, as well as jumps in indications of potential complications.

For example, based on findings from Kaiser Permanente's database of medical records, the California-based HMO began curbing the use of Vioxx among members one year before the drug was withdrawn from the market (*Wall Street Journal*, 4/15).

© 1998-2008. All Rights Reserved. iHealthBeat is published daily for
The California HealthCare Foundation by The Advisory Board Company.