HEALTH

30 NEW DRUGS APPROVED IN 1991; FOCUS IS ON SERIOUS AND LIFE-THREATENING DISEASES

WASHINGTON, D.C. — American's pharmaceutical research companies won approval in 1991 for 30 new drugs, 7 more than were approved in 1990. This ties the record set in 1985 for the number of reviews of new drugs completed by the Food and Drug Administration in a year. "The industry is pleased by FDA's success this past year in making more new important therapies available to physicians and their patients," said Executive vice President Robert F. Allnutt.

These new medicines, discovered and developed by America's research pharmaceutical companies, represent significant advances for serious and life-threatening diseases:

• 9 medicines were approved for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases,

• 5 for cancer and cancer-related conditions,

• 2 for AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, and

• 2 for arthritis.

Medicines also were approved for precocious puberty, respiratory distress syndrome in newborns, and lead poisoning — diseases and conditions that primarily affect children. Treatments for a rare metabolic disorder and depression, a muscle relaxant used in surgery, and a drug to reverse the effects of a specific sedative also were approved.

In addition to the 30 new drugs, 8 important biologics were approved: 3 therapeutics, 2 vaccines and 3 diagnostics. The therapeutics are:

• A medicine for use in bone marrow transplantation to treat certain cancers. It is used to promote the growth of infection-fighting white blood cells.

• A treatment for chemotheapy-induced neutropenia, a condition involving an abnormally low white blood cell count that can leave a patient vulnerable to life-threatening infections.

• A therapy for a blood-clotting disorder.

The 2 vaccines are for rabies and for the fourth and fifth immunization against diphtheria, tetanus toxoids and pertussis in children previously immunized with whole-cell DTP vaccine.

Of the 8 biologics, only 2 are genetically engineered. Both of them are indicated for cancer or cancer-related conditions.

Nine orphan drugs for rare diseases were approved in 1991; 7 are drugs and 2 are biologics. They include therapies for rare blood and growth disorders, cancer and cancer-related conditions, and a serious respiratory problem in premature infants.

FDA also improved its performance in the area of efficacy supplements, approving 28 new uses in 1991 for already-approved medicines, compared with 15 in 1990. These included approvals for cancers, cardiovascular disease and gastrointestinal bleeding.

More information about the new drug approvals of 1991 is available in a report titled, "New Drug approvals in 1991." For a free copy, please write to "New Drug Approvals in 1991," PMA, 1100 Fifteen Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association is a non-profit scientific and professional organization of more than 100 member companies that discover, develop and produce most of the prescription drugs in the United States.

Rx For Health–Insurance Red Tape

Confusing forms, disqualified bills and maddening bureaucracy don't have to torpedo your health-insurance claims, reports the March '92 Reader's Digest.

Here are some tips from experts to keep your health insurer from driving you crazy.

• **Be thorough.** Fill in every blank when completing a form. Even omitting your date of birth can be ground for rejection.

• **Be suspicious.** Never take "no" for an answer the first time. Every medical procedure has a code, and sometimes claims are turned down simply because a distracted computer operator punched in the wrong numbers. One expert said that 30 percent of claims were rejected because some minor detail was wrong numbers. One expert said that 30 percent of claims were rejected because some minor detail was wrong.

• **Know your policy. Call before your treatment to find** out how much your health insurer will pay.

• **Challenge the "experimental" label.** Often there are gray areas. A bone-marrow transplant might be acceptable for Hodgkin's disease but experimental for breast cancer.

If you're at odds with the insurance company, file an appeal by phone or in writing. A third party usually will be brought into decide the matter. As a last resort, take your case to court.

• **Manage your own care.** Hoping to control overuse of health-care services, employers are increasingly turning to managed-care companies. Too often, this means more work for the patient.

Most likely you'll encounter "utilization review" (UR) — prior approval for hospital admissions or medical procedures, or to find out whether you need a second opinion. But if you don't make the call, you can be hit with a penalty of as much as $1,000.

To prevent penalties, keep careful records. Call your UR company three to five days in advance of a hospital stay and ask for written confirmation or approval. Jot down the name of the person you contact.

• **Go to the top.** If you've taken all these precautions and still have trouble, go straight to the company's claim supervisor or to the home office.

If that fails, write a letter of complaint to your insurer. Say that unless you get a prompt resolution, you're going to file the letter with your state insurance department or your Congressman.