

Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand

478 Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Re: Regulating Soaring Prices of Prescription Drugs

Dear Senator Gillibrand,

My name is Sheela Albuquerque and I am writing to bring to your attention a problem that many people are having with their insurance companies as well as the pharmaceutical companies. I have recently been helping my grandmother with picking up her medications at the pharmacy and dropping them off to her and recently she has been forced to buy the brand name cholesterol treatment medication Zetia. She is living off of a fixed income and cannot afford for the prices of her medication to be raised. I have called her insurance company to get a better understanding as to why they no longer cover the generic brand for this medication and were unable to give me a clear answer. They have told her that the generic ezetimibe will no longer be covered and they only will cover the brand name, but she will still need to pay a copay towards the brand name medication that she didn't have to do before. They are making it difficult for her to continue her drug treatment which she has taken for years. Instead they are forcing her to change medications. She has always taken this medication and has never had any issues health wise and I feel it can be dangerous for her to switch at this point when there is no need since she is not having any side effects. The only reason I figure they may want her to change is to benefit them. I feel like the drug companies as well as the medical insurance companies are taking control of how to manage the care of a patient instead of the doctor. The doctor has the knowledge and expertise in the way they prescribe certain medications and for these companies to come in and take charge and make decisions for the doctors I believe is unethical. There needs to be better guidelines or regulations when it comes to those who make the decisions on what the patient should be prescribed. I am only one case in many that need help with regulating the prices on many of the pharmaceutical drugs. In the article "*Take the Generic, Patient Are told, Until They Are Not,*" a pharmacy owner Robert Frankil was surprised by the change of the brand-name drug being the preferred drug for insurance companies. "There's only one reason why they're requiring you to use more expensive product," Mr. Frankil said. "Because somewhere down the road, somebody is earning more money."

I personally work for a doctor and we deal with prior authorizations as well as the insurance companies telling us what medications the patient must try before they can consider covering a certain medication. It is extra work for the doctor and staff and it only lengthens the time that the patient is going without their medicine. It is not fair to the patient or the doctor. Prior authorizations should be taken away. Many times, they have us try certain medications first before they cover the medication the doctor wants the patient to take. I have had instances where the patient has side effects, or their symptoms become worse because we are going through a list of medicines that the insurance company wants us to try before they will cover the medication the doctor wants them to use. Now they have to be forced to only buy brand name drugs when there are many out there that can work better for each individual patient.

There are many patients who need certain medications on a daily basis and it's unfortunate that pharmaceutical companies are taking advantage of the people who most need them. Martin Shkreli's is one example, "for price gouging after his company, Turing pharmaceuticals, raised the price of a 62-year-old drug it had acquired to \$750 a pill from \$13.50." His company sold drugs used to treat toxoplasmosis, a parasitic infection that can be life threatening in patients with cancer and AIDS. It was an unfortunate situation for a patient who needed this medication to have to purchase out of pocket with no other choice. There are other companies where the drugs are needed on a daily basis for patients to survive.

I have written to you today to hopefully bring forth to the other senators about this issue and help in coming up with a solution to help the people who find it hard to afford their medications by hopefully coming up with new regulations towards the pharmaceutical companies to lower their prices on medications. As well as possibly taking away all the rules and prior authorizations the insurance companies require doctors to do to get a drug approved for a patient.

Thank you for your time,

Sheela Albuquerque

Ornstein, Charles and Thomas, Katie. "Take the Generic, Patients Are Told. Until They Are Not" *The New York Times* 6 Aug. 2017

Pollack, Andrew and Creswell, Julie. "Martin Shkreli, the Mercurial Man Behind the Drug Price Increase That Went Viral" *The New York Times* 20 Sept. 2015

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/buyingusingmedicinesafely/genericdrugs/ucm167991.htm>