

Study finds staggering cost of treating diabetics

By Bill Berkrot | June 19, 2007

NEW YORK (Reuters) - One out of every eight U.S. federal health care dollars is spent treating people with diabetes, a study found, and advocates are calling for the creation of a government post to oversee coordination of spending on treatment and prevention among federal agencies.

The study, based on federal spending data from 2005, looked at various government health programs to determine how much was spent on diabetics versus non diabetics. It found it cost the U.S. government \$79.7 billion more to treat people with the disease, or some 12 percent of the \$645 billion in total federal health care spending projected that year.

The National Changing Diabetes Program (NCDP) study was being released at a briefing with the Congressional Diabetes Caucus on Tuesday. The study, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research for NCDP — a coalition of diabetes thought leaders, including physician organizations and disease advocacy groups — included all federally-funded programs that have an impact on diabetes prevention and treatment.

“Often we think about diabetes only residing with the Department of Health and Human Services,” said Dana Haza, senior director of NCDP, which is funded by Denmark’s Novo Nordisk, one of world’s largest sellers of insulin and diabetes products.

“But when you look at the findings of this study, actually 18 of 21 federal agencies have a budgetary influence impact on diabetes,” she said, noting agencies that deal with veterans, prisoners, school lunch programs and food stamps as examples.

“The staggering cost of treating diabetes and the number of diabetes-related programs highlight a need

for a national diabetes coordinator to ensure results,” Haza said. “We are spending as much on diabetes as we are on the entire Department of Education, but no one is leading the effort.”

A report by Medco Health Solutions Inc. issued last month found that the growing diabetes epidemic and more aggressive treatment could result in soaring costs to treat the disease over the next three years.

An analysis of Medco’s 2007 Drug Trend Report found that, by 2009, spending just on medicines to treat diabetes could soar 60 percent to 68 percent from 2006 levels. The sales of diabetes drugs in the United States reached \$9.88 billion in 2005, according to data from IMS Health Inc.

“Coordinating America’s response to diabetes should be mandatory,” said Lana Vukovljak, CEO of American Association of Diabetes Educators.

“Over the next 30 years, diabetes is expected to claim the lives of 62 million Americans. Surely this health crisis warrants the appointment of a manager charged with aligning budgets and programs for diabetes at the federal level,” Vukovljak said in a statement.

Uncontrolled diabetes can result in a wide variety of serious health complications, including heart disease, stroke, vision loss, amputation of extremities and kidney disease.

“Our findings suggest that there are many missed opportunities for the federal government to enhance its impact on diabetes prevention, detection, treatment and management of complications,” Marsha Gold, who led Mathematica’s research team, said in a statement.

REU-1724MES