

Does XL suffix mean slower price decay?

When generic venlafaxine was launched in the UK at the end of 2008, *Generics bulletin* noted the presence of both unbranded immediate-release tablets and branded extended-release capsules on the market. Teva was one of the few companies to have both unbranded tablets in the two lower strengths of 37.5mg and 75mg, as well as Romodel XL 75mg and 150mg capsules. This echoed the Efexor and Efexor XL brand offerings from Wyeth, although not the variety of pack sizes (*Generics bulletin*, 16 January 2009, page 19).

Today, the Department of Health has fixed upon 56-count packs of 37.5mg and 75mg tablets in the immediate-release form and 28-capsule packs of 75mg and 150mg “modified-release” venlafaxine for its Drug Tariff of reimbursement prices for pharmacists and dispensing doctors in England and Wales.

The department has also put venlafaxine tablets into category M, which is based on market prices, and capsules into category C, comprising “drugs which are not readily available as a generic”. As a result, generic capsule reimbursement prices are based on those for Efexor and are over four-times more expensive for the same 75mg strength than tablets. Pharmacists were reimbursed £22.50 (US\$35.36) for dispensing 28-capsule packs of 75mg modified-release venlafaxine in October, but only £4.71 for larger 56-tablet packs of 75mg tablets, after a 20% reduction on the September reimbursement price of £6.06.

Investigating how the trade prices of venlafaxine in its two forms, three strengths and various pack sizes had fared in almost two years since launch, WaveData initially noticed that the price-decay rates of modified-release forms of venlafaxine appeared to show slower decay rates than the immediate-release forms. However, when this picture was compared with what happened to felodipine, which lost its patent protection in November 2003, WaveData noticed that the release rate appeared not to be an important factor.

“The question ‘why’ necessitated some investigation into which manufacturers were making which forms of venlafaxine,” explained WaveData’s managing director, Charles Joynson. “This revealed there were a number of listings for ‘Retard’ and modified-release (MR) forms on suppliers’ price lists, which was confusing as no manufacturer currently makes a venlafaxine Retard or MR product. They are all called either immediate-release, SR or XL.”

“In both venlafaxine 75mg and 150mg strengths, the non-existent Retard form is the cheapest – mainly through Strathclyde Wholesale, which is almost certainly confusing pharmacists by calling the XL product Retard – with the XL form following a close second (see Figures 1 and 2),” Joynson said. “With felodipine,” he added, “there is little difference, although the XL form is marginally cheaper than the others (see Figures 3 and 4).”

Joynson suggested that Wyeth with Efexor – and other originators with felodipine – had attempted to switch prescribing to the XL form to ‘evergreen’ the molecule, thereby retaining market share. “This might explain why the XL form makes up more than half of the trade-price data for venlafaxine today, and the vast majority of price offers for venlafaxine capsules,” he said, noting that Wyeth had discontinued offering Efexor immediate-release tablets in November 2009.

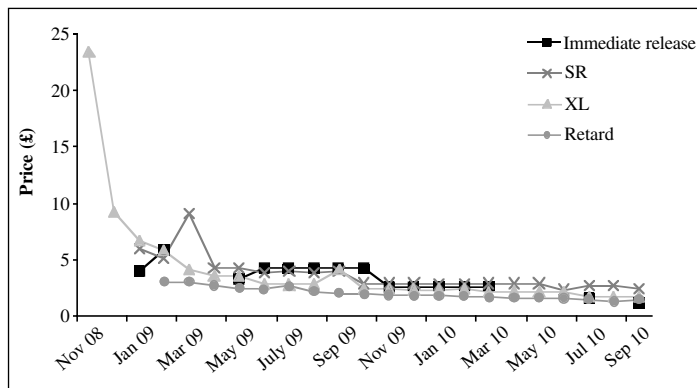


Figure 1: Price decay since launch of 28-capsule packs of venlafaxine 75mg with various suffixes as described in trade price lists (Source – WaveData)

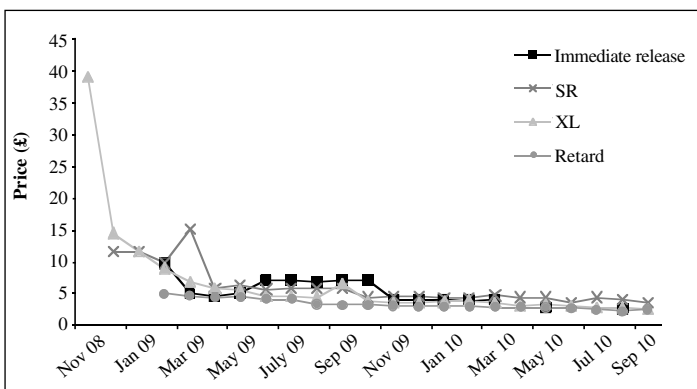


Figure 2: Price decay since launch of 28-capsule packs of venlafaxine 150mg with various suffixes as described in trade price lists (Source – WaveData)

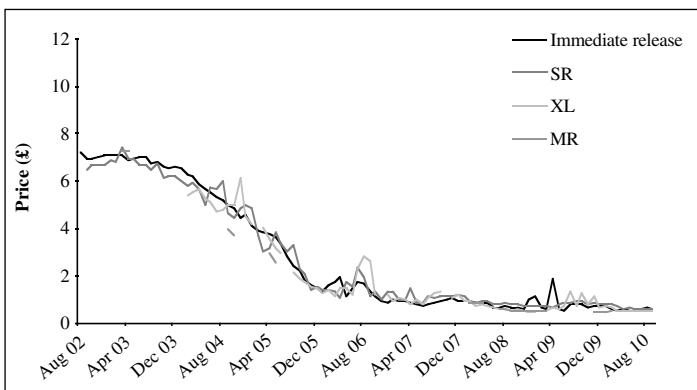


Figure 3: Price decay since launch of 28-tablet packs of felodipine 5mg with various suffixes as described in trade price lists (Source – WaveData)

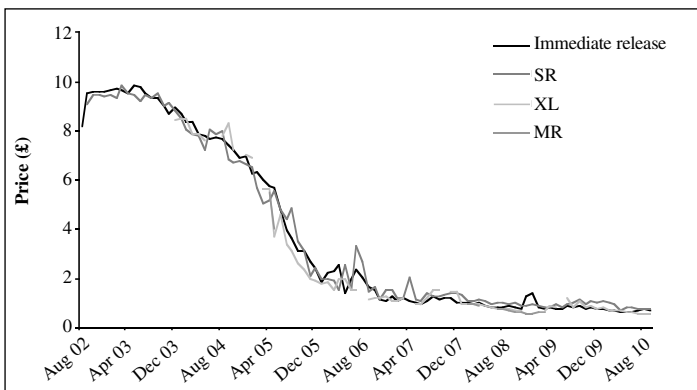


Figure 4: Price decay since launch of 28-tablet packs of felodipine 10mg with various suffixes as described in trade price lists (Source – WaveData)

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