

Sumatriptan dives faster than glimepiride

Prices for generic sumatriptan have collapsed rapidly in the UK in the nine months since launch, but those for glimepiride have fared a little better since the diabetes treatment became generic at the end of 2005.

Initial indications looked promising for glimepiride, with launch prices to independent pharmacists and dispensing doctors only showing a 26% or 27% discount to the Amaryl brand from Sanofi-Aventis. A 30-tablet pack of glimepiride 1mg in January 2006 cost £3.32 (US\$6.40) on average, and there were no further discounts available.

Similarly, 30-tablet packs of glimepiride 2mg cost £5.45 on average compared with a brand price of £7.42. This 27% discount on the brand price was also the best available, indicating that at launch there was only one active supplier in the market. This supposition was strengthened by the lowest prices for glimepiride 3mg and 4mg also being the same as their average prices.

However, the market soon started to warm up with the lowest prices parting company with average prices as Figures 1 and 2 show. By April, the average prices in the market for 30-tablet packs of the two lower strengths had slipped such that the 1mg strength offered a 34% discount on the brand price, and the 2mg strength could be purchased at a 39% discount to the Amaryl equivalent.

Minimum prices, meanwhile, had fallen faster. Glimepiride 1mg was available at a 46% discount to the brand and the best bargain for the 2mg strength was a 55% discount to Amaryl. By February of this year, the gap between average prices and lowest prices had grown, as had the discounts to the equivalent brand price.

These discounts, however, were only in the 50% to 60% range, which after more than a year on the UK market represented an attractive return, compared with other recent generic launches. This may not last much longer, judging by the fall of the lowest prices recently. At £0.50 for the 1mg strength, February's lowest price represented an 89% discount to the brand, although it had only been 71% a month earlier. Similarly, at £1.38, the 4mg strength could be bought at a 91% discount, compared with 74% in January.

Companies that decided to chase the sumatriptan opportunity have not been so fortunate. Prices for 6-tablet packs of generic sumatriptan 50mg and 100mg started low at launch last May and have fallen rapidly since (see Figure 3). The average price at launch offered a 60% discount to GlaxoSmithKline's Imigran originator, while bargains at a 75% discount were already available.

By this February, there was little to choose between average and lowest prices, as both offered more than a 90% discount to the brand. The best deal on offer was just £1.00 for a six-tablet pack of sumatriptan 50mg, giving a 96% discount on GlaxoSmithKline's list price. The average price of £2.55 offered a 91% discount to the migraine brand, while £4.01 for the 100mg strength represented a similar deal. Meanwhile, the lowest price of £2.25 for the same strength was 95% less than the brand price of £44.64.

Interestingly, prices for 12-tablet packs have held up better. They only offered a 20% to 30% discount last June, a month after launch, and although minimum prices have recently caught up with the smaller packs at a 94% discount level, average prices still only offer 50% to 60% discounts to the brand.

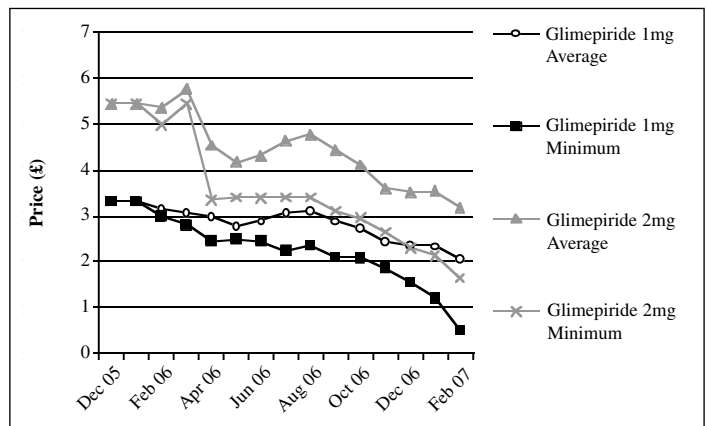


Figure 1: Average and lowest prices of 30-tablet packs of the two lower strengths of glimepiride in the months since generic launch (Source - WaveData)

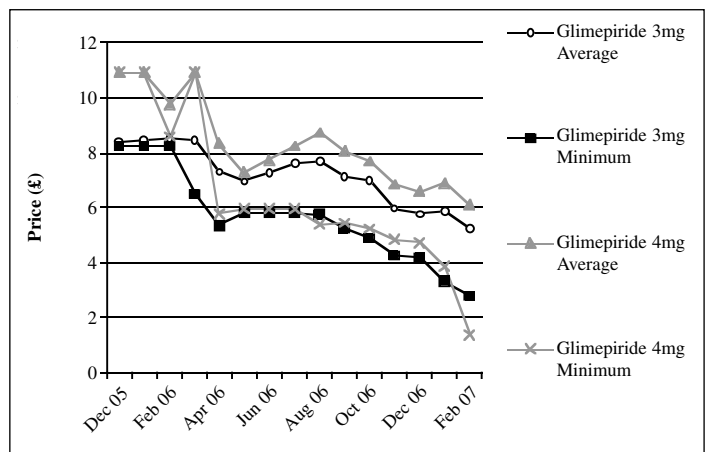


Figure 2: Average and lowest prices of 30-tablet packs of the two higher strengths of glimepiride in the months since generic launch (Source - WaveData)

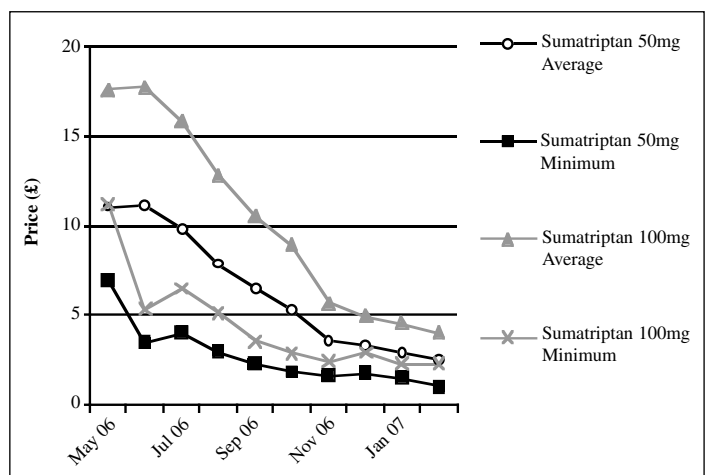


Figure 3: Average and lowest prices for six-tablet packs of sumatriptan 50mg and 100mg in the months since generic launch (Source - WaveData)

PRICE WATCH UK highlights generics price changes in the UK market and appears exclusively in every issue of **Generics bulletin**, courtesy of the Pharma TouchStone service of WaveData.

WaveData collects and collates pricing information from a number of European countries. In the UK, pricing information about generics, brands and parallel imports is gathered from offers made to independent retail pharmacists and dispensing doctors by wholesalers, suppliers and product manufacturers.

WaveData collates this data and publishes the results giving customers fast, accurate, real-time access to current generic prices. WaveData's Profesy price-forecasting tool can be found at www.wavedata.biz.

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