

# Topiramate's trade prices take a tumble

Topiramate prices have followed a familiar pattern to those of other recent generic launches in the UK since the epilepsy treatment was introduced as an alternative to Janssen-Cilag's Topamax in the last week of September. Six generics companies – Actavis, Arrow, Ratiopharm, Sandoz, Teva and Tillomed – were recorded by WaveData as offering prices to independent pharmacists and dispensing doctors during October for topiramate equivalents to the four strengths of Topamax tablets.

Generic prices for 60-tablet packs of topiramate 25mg were as low as £9.84 (US\$16.50) – 50% of the brand price – at launch, although the average generics price recorded by WaveData was £11.79. This represented a 40% discount on the brand's trade price of £19.68. Similarly, the lowest trade price of 60-tablet packs of topiramate 50mg was £16.17 – almost exactly half the Topamax price of £32.33 – but the average price was £19.40, which was again equivalent to a 40% discount on the brand price. Prices then fell away still more in the weeks that followed, with the lowest price offers widening the gap below the average price (see Figures 1 and 2).

Meanwhile, the generics players were having to contend with tactics employed by the brand originator to defend its franchise. Just as they had four years ago in response to GlaxoSmithKline's campaign to prolong the life of its Lamictal (lamotrigine) epilepsy brand, generics firms were obliged to stress that no evidence existed that switching epileptic patients from the brand originator to generic topiramate had an adverse clinical outcome (*Generics bulletin*, 30 October 2009, page 13).

"Topiramate is rapidly and well absorbed," stated the British Generic Manufacturers Association (BGMA). "Its pharmacokinetics are predictable with plasma levels directly related to dose, and very small differences between patients." Capsule versions of the two lower topiramate tablet strengths were also available on the market under the name Topamax Sprinkle.

The lowest prices of the four tablet strengths of topiramate declined steeply during October, although the rapid fall seems to have levelled off in the earlier part of this month (see Figures 3 and 4).

The lowest price recorded for 60-tablet packs of topiramate 200mg so far was the £14.99 recorded last month. This represented an 87% discount on the brand price of £112.46 just a few weeks after launch. This discount was slightly more than for 60-tablet packs of topiramate 100mg, which could be bought in the trade for £7.99, an 86% discount on the £57.91 brand price.

Prices for the lower two strengths of topiramate have decayed by similar amounts. Earlier this month, it was possible for pharmacists to buy the lowest strength of topiramate tablets for £2.95 a pack, representing an 85% discount on the brand price, and topiramate 50mg tablets for £4.65, which gave them an 86% discount on what they were paying for the brand.

As the prices they were reimbursed for dispensing topiramate were those of the brand's trade price – topiramate is still in category C of the Drug Tariff – pharmacists' profit margins for dispensing the drug were exactly the same as the massive price discounts.

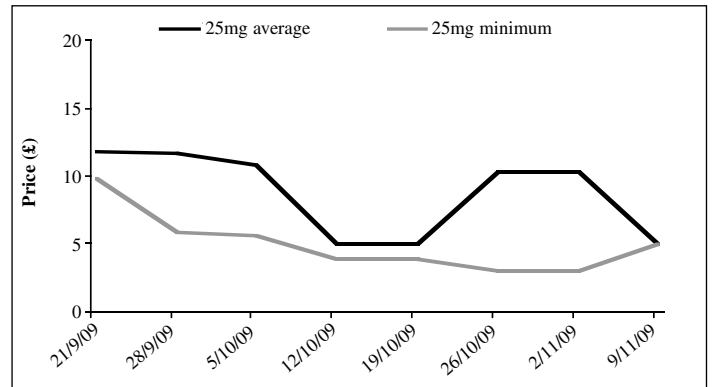


Figure 1: Weekly changes in the lowest and average generic trade prices recorded for 60-tablet packs of topiramate 25mg (Source-WaveData)

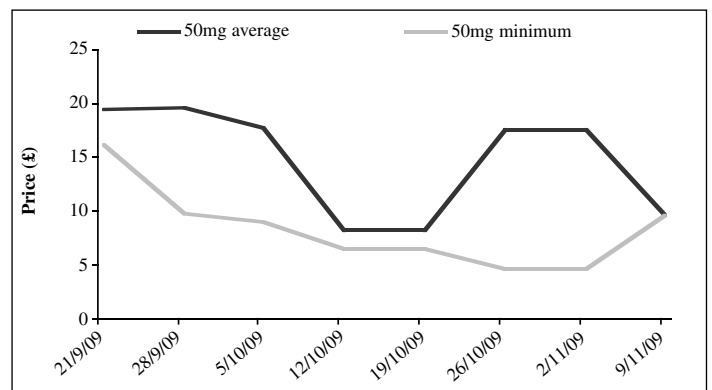


Figure 2: Weekly changes in the lowest and average generic trade prices recorded for 60-tablet packs of topiramate 50mg (Source-WaveData)

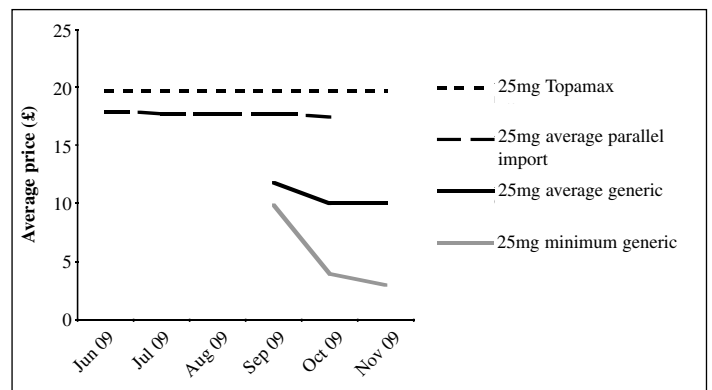


Figure 3: Monthly changes in the prices for 60-tablet packs of generic topiramate 25mg compared with brand and average parallel-import prices (Source – WaveData)

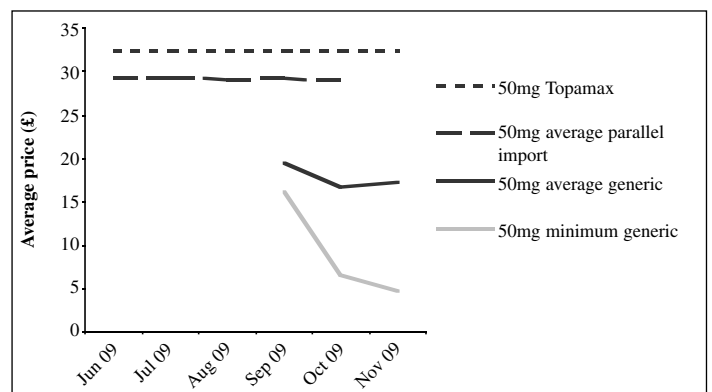


Figure 4: Monthly changes in the prices for 60-tablet packs of generic topiramate 50mg compared with brand and average parallel-import prices (Source – WaveData)

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