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Consumer Reports Launches Public Education Campaign to Help Consumers Save on Medicines

Best Buy Drugs kicks off by comparing price, effectiveness in three drug categories

(Washington D.C.) – Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine, today launched an educational and outreach initiative and free website, www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org, that will compare a variety of prescription drugs on price, effectiveness and safety to help consumers and their doctors identify the most effective and affordable medicines.

The first reports to be released compare drugs in three widely-used categories: cholesterol-lowering medication, heartburn and acid reflux treatments, and anti-inflammatories commonly used to treat arthritis. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*™ eventually will compare approximately 20 categories of the most widely used drugs based on price and scientific evidence. When justified by the evidence, the organization will choose a *Best Buy Drug* in a given category.

“One of the most serious problems in health care today is that tens of millions Americans aren’t taking the medicines they need, in large part because they can’t afford them,” said Joel Gurin, executive vice president of Consumers Union. “By identifying lower-cost medicines that are every bit as effective, we hope to change that.

“We also hope the drug industry will compete more aggressively on price when consumers begin to migrate to effective and safe drugs that are also more affordable,” Gurin added.

By logging onto www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org, consumers will find downloadable reports of the first three drug categories analyzed. Among the findings:

- For **cholesterol-lowering drugs** known as statins, the analysis yielded the selection of **generic lovastatin** as the *Best Buy Drug* for people who need to reduce their LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels by less than 40 percent. The drug costs an average of about \$1 a day, compared with more expensive – but not necessarily more effective or safer – statins that can cost in excess of \$4 a day. However, for those who need to reduce their LDL by more than 40 percent, **Lipitor (atorvastatin)** was selected as the *Best Buy Drug*.
- For treatment of **heartburn, ulcer and acid reflux disease** – drugs known as proton pump inhibitors – the analysis resulted in the selection of the over-the-counter drug **Prilosec OTC (omeprazole)** as a *Best Buy Drug*. At a cost of about 79 cents a day, **Prilosec OTC** costs one-fifth that of the next least expensive drug. Because it is sold over-the-counter, the report suggests consumers with prescription drug coverage check with their health insurance plan to see if it offers a discount coupon, or talk with their doctor about choosing a drug that has the lowest out-of-pocket cost under their plan.
- For **treatment of arthritis and pain**, CU’s evaluation selected **generic ibuprofen** and **generic salsalate** as the *Best Buy Drugs*. At an average cost of \$24 to \$30 a month, both prescription

medicines are substantially less expensive than other drugs in the class called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs). The scientific evidence shows the two drugs are as effective as any NSAID, including best-selling Celebrex (celecoxib). This is particularly good news for people with arthritis who are now looking for an alternative to Vioxx, which has been withdrawn from the market for safety reasons. The report suggests that people with a history of stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal bleeding talk with their doctor about their options, and consider avoiding NSAIDs altogether.

Each month, *CRBestBuyDrugs.org* will feature a report on another drug category. The Web site will enable people to download information and take it to their doctor to discuss the most cost-effective treatment options.

“Consumers and their doctors need credible, unbiased information about the comparative effectiveness and cost of prescription drugs,” said Gail Shearer, director of health policy analysis based in Consumers Union’s Washington Office. “We hope that our outreach and educational efforts will result in millions of people being able to afford needed medicines, and in large savings for many others whose doctors prescribe an effective, lower-cost prescription instead of a high-priced medicine,” Shearer added.

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs combines evidence-based research on the comparative effectiveness and safety of prescription drugs with national-level data on drug prices. The information on drug effectiveness is derived from the Drug Effectiveness Review Project (DERP) which used teams of physicians and researchers at the Oregon Health & Science University Evidence-based Practice Center. The Project compiles drug effectiveness data for states to shape prescription drug coverage choices for their Medicaid programs. Drug price information used by CU is based on average retail prices paid in cash by consumers at the pharmacy. The CU reports are peer-reviewed by medical experts in the particular drug category.

In addition to the website, *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* will do significant outreach to physician, pharmacist, senior and low-income groups to help ensure the information gets into their hands. The initial outreach campaign will launch in Atlanta and Sacramento early next year and then will expand to California, Georgia, and other states later in 2005.

Among the groups that have agreed to partner with Consumers Union to help disseminate the information are the American Public Health Association, the Alliance for Retired Americans, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare and the American Medical School Association. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* is funded in part with a major grant from the Engelberg Foundation, a charitable trust that supports a wide range of activities in the fields of health care, science and education. The project is also partially funded through a grant from the National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health.

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs is one of several health projects being launched by Consumers Union, which is committed to helping consumers get credible, trustworthy information to make informed decisions about their healthcare. CU recently began a grassroots advocacy campaign, www.PrescriptionforChange.org, to empower consumers to change state and federal policies to help ensure safe, effective and affordable prescription drugs for all. Among the campaign’s top priorities is a public clinical drug trial registry to ensure all safety information is accessible to doctors, researchers and patients.

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Quick Reference for Some Sample Savings

Therapeutic Category	Goal	CR Best Buy Drug (monthly cost)	Example of Monthly Savings	Example of Annual Savings
Cholesterol Reducing Statins	Moderate reduction of LDL (bad cholesterol)	Lovastatin (generic) 10 mg (\$28) or 20 mg (\$40)	\$108 ¹	\$1,296
Cholesterol Reducing Statins	Reduction of LDL (bad cholesterol) of more than 40%	Atorvastatin (Lipitor) 20, 40, or 80 mg (\$117)	\$31 ²	\$372
Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) for Heartburn and Acid Reflux	Relieve heartburn, acid reflux, and ulcers	Omeprazole (Prilosec OTC) (over-the-counter) 20 mg (\$24)	\$145 ³	\$1,740
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for arthritis, pain	Treatment of osteoarthritis and mild to moderate pain	Ibuprofen (generic) 400 mg (3 x a day) (\$24) 600 mg (3 x a day) (\$30) and	\$188 ⁴	\$2,256
		Salsalate (generic) 750 mg (3 x a day) (\$24) or 4 x a day (\$32)	\$180 ⁵	\$2,160

¹ Comparing the cost of 20 mg generic Lovastatin with the cost of 20 mg Simvastatin (Zocor)

² Comparing the cost of 20, 40, and 80 mg Atorvastatin (Lipitor) with cost of Simvastatin (Zocor) 40 mg

³ Omeprazole (Prilosec OTC) compared to Lansoprazole (Prevacid) 30 mg sustained release capsules

⁴ Ibuprofen (generic) 400 mg (3 x a day) compared with Celecoxib (Celebrex) 200 mg 2 x a day

⁵ Salsalate (generic) 750 mg (4 x a day) compared with Celecoxib (Celebrex) 200 mg 2 x a day