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BIOTECH

Consumers to save big as Lexapro patent expires

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Until now, there has not been a equivalent version generic of Lexapro on the market. *Bloomberg*

For the second time in less than four months, one of the nation's top-selling drugs is losing patent protection, opening the market to lower cost generics that will bring significant savings to consumers.

The anti-depressant [Lexapro](#), which generated \$2.8 billion in sales in the U.S. in 2010, will come off patent on March 14. Forest Laboratories ([FRX](#)), which markets the drug nationally, says that Mylan Pharmaceuticals will introduce a generic version of Lexapro the day the patent expires. Teva also will release generic Lexapro, but hasn't announced when it will do so.

The price of Lexapro, like other brand-name drugs, varies widely. Consumer Reports magazine says that a month's supply of the drug sells for about \$120. People with insurance typically face a co-pay in the \$15-\$30 range. The prices will drop as generics become available.

The expiration of a patent is good for consumers, but can damage a company's bottom line. "More than 80 percent of the (drug's) volume is replaced by generic alternatives within six months," says Pharmacy Times.

The demand for generics also has been growing, partly because many people lost their jobs and life insurance during the recession.

Pfizer reported a big drop in fourth quarter earnings due to the loss of patent protection on the anti-cholesterol drug Lipitor last November. Lipitor was the top-selling drug in the U.S. in 2010. The third-highest selling drug, the blood thinner Plavix, will come off patent later this year.

Lexapro ranked 19th in sales in 2010, due largely to growing demand for anti-depressants, the second-most widely prescribed type of drug in the country, according to the IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics .

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