Access to Care Issue Brief

The National Psoriasis Foundation exists to find a cure for psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis and to eliminate their devastating effects through research, advocacy and education. The Foundation is the largest psoriasis patient advocacy organization and charitable funder of psoriatic disease research worldwide. The Foundation assists approximately 1.5 million people annually through educational programs and services. Psoriasis, the most prevalent autoimmune disease in the nation, is a noncontagious, chronic, inflammatory, painful, disfiguring and disabling disease for which there is no cure. It is often accompanied by psoriatic arthritis, a specific form of arthritis that is painful and debilitating and causes joint damage. Psoriasis appears on the skin, most often as red, scaly patches that itch and may bleed, and it requires sophisticated medical care. Current studies indicate that the prevalence of psoriasis in the United States ranges between 2 and 3 percent, affecting approximately 7.5 million Americans.1

While on its own psoriasis can be a painful and physically as well as psychologically devastating condition, it often is accompanied by many other serious issues.2 Specifically:

- People with psoriasis have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease,3 diabetes4, hypertension5, and stroke6 independent of other risk factors. Psoriasis patients also appear to have more difficult to control hypertension compared to non-psoriatic hypertensive patients.7 Severe psoriasis confers an additional risk of major adverse cardiac events8 and is associated with an increased death rate.9 A higher prevalence of atherosclerosis10, Crohn’s disease11, cancer12, metabolic syndrome13, obesity14 and liver disease15 are found in people with psoriasis as compared to the general population. Psoriasis is also associated with several complications of the eye.16 In addition, patients with psoriasis are more likely to have other autoimmune diseases.17
- Pregnant women with psoriasis are at higher risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth and low birth weight, independent of other risk factors.18
- Recent studies have established that the risk of premature death is 50 percent higher for people with severe psoriasis and that these individuals die four years younger, on average, than those without psoriasis.19
- In addition to the physical impact, psoriasis can exact a significant emotional toll. People with psoriasis have an increased risk of depression, anxiety and suicidality20; they also report feeling self-conscious, embarrassed and helpless.21 Pediatric patients with psoriasis have an increased risk of developing psychiatric disorders, especially depression and anxiety.22

The National Psoriasis Foundation maintains a strong commitment to support public policies and programs to achieve a cure, make progress toward better treatments and end health insurance policies and procedures that are harmful to people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. Increasing access to insurance coverage is one step, but it is not enough, as many insured patients are unable to afford the medical care and the full range of treatments that are necessary to manage serious, chronic and potentially debilitating diseases, such as psoriasis.

People with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis are adversely affected by out-of-pocket costs, which continue to rise to unprecedented levels as the cost of care burden is shifted to the patient by insurance companies and employers. Many companies place specialty drugs into a drug formulary category requiring higher copayments. The increasing use of “specialty tiers” to shift a hefty proportion of the cost of biologics poses a financial challenge to many patients. Of serious concern is that a patient’s inability to pay for the therapeutic may disrupt adherence to treatment regimens. Patients who cannot afford the high cost of prescription are more likely to not fill a prescription, take a drug in smaller doses than prescribed or take a medication less frequently than prescribed.23

The National Psoriasis Foundation supports efforts to reduce impediments to accessing care. As a partner in the Coalition for Accessible Treatments, the Foundation calls on Congress to pass the Patients’ Access to Treatments Act of 2013 (H.R. 460/seeking Senate sponsorship), legislation which would reduce the adverse impact of specialty tiering practices that are impeding access to medically necessary treatments, by limit cost-sharing applicable to prescription drugs in a specialty drug tier to the amount applicable in a non-preferred brand drug tier. This bill will help ensure that people with psoriasis and other chronic conditions have access to the therapy that their health care provider determines is most appropriate for them. We must ensure that people with psoriatic disease have access to the care and treatment options they need to function normally and live full lives.
References


