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Author: Annika Herr Moritz Suppliet

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Tiered co-payments, pricing, and demand in reference price markets for pharmaceuticals ☆

Annika Herr^{a,1,*}, Moritz Suppliet^b

^a Duesseldorf Institute for Competition Economics (DICE), Heinrich Heine University ^b TILEC and Department of Economics, Tilburg University

Abstract

Health insurance companies curb price-insensitive behavior and the moral hazard of insureds by means of cost-sharing, such as tiered co-payments or reference pricing in drug markets. This paper evaluates the effect of price limits—below which drugs are exempt from co-payments—on prices and on demand. First, using a difference-in-differences estimation strategy, we find that the new policy decreases prices by 5 percent for generics and increases prices by 4 percent for brand-name drugs in the German reference price market. Second, estimating a nested-logit demand model, we show that consumers appreciate co-payment exempt drugs and calculate lower price elasticities for brand-name drugs than for generics. This explains the different price responses of brand-name and generic drugs and shows that price-related co-payment tiers are an effective tool to steer demand to low-priced drugs.

Keywords: Drug prices; Cost-sharing; Co-payments; Reference pricing; Regulation; Firm behavior; Health Insurance; Demand model; Price elasticity *JEL*: I18, L51, I11, L11

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^{*}Corresponding author

Email addresses: annika.herr@dice.hhu.de (Annika Herr),

 $[\]verb|m.suppliet@tilburguniversity.edu| (Moritz Suppliet)$

Universitaetsstrasse 1, 40225 Duesseldorf, Germany, Tel: +49 211 81 15497

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