

Expense of cancer pills can be hard to swallow

By Michelle Andrews, NPR

If you've got cancer, chances are you'd rather take a pill to fight the cancer cells than sit for hours hooked up to an IV line as the chemotherapy drips slowly into you.

The difficulty is, many of the new cancer pills, which often target cancer cells for destruction but leave healthy cells intact, are pricey, costing tens of thousands of dollars for a course of treatment. And how some insurers pay for treatments means that pills can wind up costing a patient more than chemotherapy given by IV.

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now require private health plans to cover cancer-fighting pills, if they're available, to the same degree and without charging patients more than they would for traditional intravenous infusion therapy, according to the National Patient Advocate Foundation.

So, for example, a health plan that has a \$1,500 limit on out-of-pocket spending for outpatient services like IV chemotherapy can't charge more than that annually for their treatment pills.

But Medicare beneficiaries don't benefit from these laws.

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