



CODOXO

Forensic AI Alert

Combination (Combo) Drugs

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What are Combo Drugs?

Drugs that include two (2) or more active ingredients combined into a single dosage form are called combination or 'combo' drugs. Combo drugs sound like a good idea; the patient can take one (1) pill to treat multiple diagnoses concurrently, but these drugs are outrageously priced and are putting a strain on healthcare spending. The drug manufacturers claim that the idea of combining two or more common medications into one (1) specialty pill is convenient for the patient and the prices that are set are based on the value they bring. These combo drugs are overpriced and may be another fraud, waste and abuse stream for pharmacies and prescribers.

What are some examples?

The following are examples of combo drugs:

- Vimovo®
- Duexis®

Vimovo

Vimovo is a combo drug that contains a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), Naproxen, and a proton pump inhibitor (PPI), Esomeprazole. It works by reducing pain/inflammation and the PPI reduces the amount of acid in the stomach.

Vimovo is indicated for adults who may have symptoms of osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and ankylosing spondylitis.

Combo Drugs References

References:

1. References:
FDA, Approved Drugs Database, Vimovo, Medication Guide, Reference ID: 4707976

https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2020/022511s025lbl.pdf#page=38
2. References:
FDA, Approved Drugs Database, Duexis, Medication Guide, Reference ID: 4465468

https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2019/022519s012lbl.pdf#page=23

The average retail price for a 90-count bottle of Vimovo is around \$2,601 (depending on the billing pharmacy). To put this in perspective, below is a cost breakdown of the individual medications used to manufacture Vimovo¹ respectively:

- Naproxen 500mg - 60-day supply - Costs an average of \$28
- Esomeprazole 20mg - 30 capsules – Costs an average of \$31
- Conclusion: two (2) separate medications will cost about \$59 compared to \$2,601 to treat the same diagnosis with a combo drug.

Duexis®

Duexis is a combo drug which contains Ibuprofen, an NSAID, and Famotidine, a H2 blocker used to prevent heartburn and symptoms related to acid indigestion.

Duexis is indicated for the relief of symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis and the Famotidine helps decrease the risk of developing upper gastrointestinal ulcers.

The cost of a 90-count bottle of Duexis is about \$2,600 (depending on the billing pharmacy). Again, to put this into perspective, below is a cost breakdown of the individual medications used to manufacture Duexis² respectively:

- Famotidine 20mg - 90-day supply – Costs an average \$19
- Ibuprofen 800mg - 90-day supply – Costs an average \$25
- Conclusion: two (2) separate medications will cost an average of about \$44 as compared to the \$2,600 bottle of Duexis.

Why should health plans monitor combo drugs?

The challenges payers face are that many prescribed combo drugs can be very costly and provide low value to the patient. Without any edits in place, these drugs are likely covered by health plans at the point of sale. Continuous monitoring, detection, and prevention of these claims is a step to alleviate the risks of inappropriate billing.

What should your health plan expect regarding claims submissions for combo drugs?

¹ The price breakdown was researched and obtained via www.drugs.com

² The price breakdown was researched and obtained via www.drugs.com

- Vimovo claims for patients with a medical diagnosis for osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and ankylosing spondylitis and history of diagnosis involving heartburn, difficulty swallowing, or persistent cough.
- Claims for Duexis for patients with medical diagnoses for rheumatoid arthritis and/or osteoarthritis and conditions involving upper gastrointestinal ulcers.

What should your health plan consider as outlier utilization for combo drugs?

- Pharmacy claims for combo drugs without correlating medical claims data.
- Non-existent diagnosis history for the indications of which the combo drug is approved. *See references above.*
- Excessive prescribing or dispensing of combo drugs from certain pharmacies, prescribers or among certain members/clusters.

How can the Codoxo Forensic AI Platform assist your health plan with identifying emerging risks, trends and other outlier claims for combo drugs?

- The AI engine and detectors identify patterns, outliers, volume and frequency across all peer groups and claims to allow health plans to quickly identify, analyze and respond to potential FWA and efficacy issues.
- The Query tool allows users to build custom queries, tailored to your organizational needs.

If you are an existing customer, please contact your Customer Success representative or support@codoxo.com for assistance with this topic. If you would like more information or to setup a demonstration of the Codoxo Forensic Platform, please contact sales@codoxo.com.