

Big Pharma ushers in new year with price hikes on hundreds of drugs

Enlarge / Ian Read, chairman and CEO of Pfizer Inc. spoke with President Trump last July about pausing drug price hikes. Pfizer now plans to increase prices of 41 of its drugs later this month.

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More than three dozen drug companies welcomed the new year with sweeping price hikes on hundreds of medicines, according to a new analysis from Rx Savings Solutions, which was first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*.

The drugs that saw list-price increases on January 1 ranged from generics and blood-pressure drugs to brand-name prescriptions such as the dry-eye treatment Restasis. The average price jump blew past inflation at 6.5 percent, with some medicines seeing double-digit increases—bucking many drug companies' vows to keep such periodic hikes under 10 percent.

Despite public and political pressure on pharmaceutical companies to reign in soaring drug prices, Tuesday's wide-ranging increases are no surprise. In December, Reuters reported that 28 drug makers had filed notifications with California agencies that they planned to raise drug prices. (A recently passed law in the Golden State requires drug makers to provide notification if they plan to raise US lists prices

by more than 16 percent over a two-year period.)

“Requests and public shaming haven’t worked,” Michael Rea, chief executive of RX Savings Solutions, told Reuters at the time. His company helps health plans and employers seek lower-cost prescription medicines. “We expect the number of 2019 increases to be even greater than in past years.”

The drug makers who have or are planning to hike prices in 2019 include pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. In July, the company made headlines by announcing that it was pausing its price increases pending new healthcare policies to be set by the Trump administration. The move came after President Trump tweeted that Pfizer and other drug companies “should be ashamed” of their pricing. Trump later praised Pfizer for responding with the pricing pause, tweeting, “We applaud Pfizer for this decision and hope other companies do the same. Great news for the American people!” But with no new policies in place to hold down prices, Pfizer has un-paused its plans and is now set to increase the price of 41 of its drugs in mid-January, as previously planned.

Other drug companies that have or plan to raise prices include Allergan PLC, GlaxoSmithKline PLC, Amgen Inc., AstraZeneca PLC, Biogen Inc., and Hikma Pharmaceuticals PLC. On Tuesday, Hikma raised its blood-pressure medication enalaprilat by a whopping 30 percent.

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