

DATE: August 6, 2018
CONTACT: Paul Fronstin, Senior Research Associate – fronstin@ebri.org
EBRI Media Relations – press-media@ebri.org

Does use of specialty medications increase worker productivity?

WASHINGTON – Spending on specialty medications is increasing; by 2020, specialty medications are expected to account for nearly one-half of total drug spending in the commercial market. But does the cost of specialty medications pay off in other ways — such as increased productivity?

In their latest *Issue Brief*, “The Relationship Between Health Plan Type, Use of Specialty Medications, and Worker Productivity,” researchers from the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) examined how the use of specialty medications might increase productivity by reducing both absenteeism and short-term disability among workers with treatable autoimmune disorders.

The answer isn’t clear, according to Fronstin. “We did not find any clear relationship between use of specialty medication and incidence of absenteeism,” he said. For example, while any specialty drug use for rheumatoid arthritis was associated with 2.5 fewer days absent (when absences occurred), for multiple sclerosis, each additional specialty drug fill was associated with 0.3 *more* days absent.

EBRI also did not find that any use of specialty medications affected whether a worker took short-term disability. However, it did find that any use of specialty medications reduced the number of days on short-term disability for workers with Crohn’s disease by 37.6 days and for workers with psoriasis by 42.6 days.

One important caveat Fronstin noted: “Our results may have been driven by the timing of taking specialty medications. Namely, those taking specialty medications could just be more acutely ill, and this would explain our findings.”

The full *Issue Brief* is available online [here](#). A related EBRI *Fast Fact* is located [here](#).

The Employee Benefit Research Institute is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute based in Washington, DC, that focuses on health, savings, retirement, and financial security issues. EBRI does not lobby and does not take policy positions. The work of EBRI is made possible by funding from its members and sponsors, which include a broad range of public, private, for-profit and nonprofit organizations. For more information go to www.ebri.org or visit the web site of EBRI’s affiliated American Savings Education Council at www.asec.org

###