

# Pharmaceutical stirs outrage over price hike for brain tumor drug

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A little known pharmaceutical company in Florida has found itself in the eye of a storm following disclosures it raised the price of an old drug used to fight brain tumors by 1,400 percent, from \$50 a pill to more than \$700.

NextSource Biotechnology in 2013 bought the license for the [drug](#) Lomustine from Bristol-Myers Squibb, which sold a 100 milligram pill of the substance for nearly \$50 apiece.

Since then, according to The Wall Street Journal, it raised the price of the same pill to \$768, marketing it in the United States under the name Gleostine.

The patent for Lomustine, which also is known as CeeNU or CCNU, has expired but there is no generic equivalent.

It was developed more than 40 years ago as a chemotherapy treatment for glioblastoma, an [aggressive brain tumor](#).

The Wall Street Journal story set off angry reactions among readers, a wave of accusations on social media of "corporate greed" and an open letter from an association of Democratic activists in Miami-Dade county demanding that NextSource be investigated for "gouging and anti-competitive practices."

Local politicians on Thursday gave their backing to the so-called

People's Progressive Caucus of Miami-Dade, which is organizing a protest Saturday outside NextSource's office in downtown Miami.

"More than anything, we'd like to get NextSource to roll back some of their prices," William Bryant, the group's spokesman, told AFP. "But we'd also like to try to secure commitments from our current and future Congress people to materially address the issue of out-of-control pharmaceutical [prices](#)."

The website Canada Drugs lists the same drug, under the name CeeNU, at \$35 for a 100mg pill.

In an editorial in the September edition of The Cancer Letter, three oncologists and pharmacologists from the Duke University Health System in Durham, North Carolina denounced NextSource's practice of arbitrary price increases as "unconscionable."

"This tactic of extreme price increases of life-saving medications is both repulsive and disheartening," they said.

"In the process of prescribing standard-of-care treatments for our patients, we pose them with an impossible dilemma: either face financial hardship to take the medication or choose not to receive potentially life-saving therapy."

## **Price gouging denied**

NextSource's lawyer, Joseph DeMaria, contended that allegations made against the company and its CEO Robert DiCrisci were defamatory and that they might sue.

"This argument that my client is this greedy company and greedy person who is trying to gouge is a total falsehood," he said.

He said NextSource, which only sells Lomustine, also produces lower priced doses of the substance averaging \$400 a pill.

The raw material used to make Lomustine, a "trade secret" DeMaria would not identify, has risen by 30 percent, he said, and the company also must pay the Food and Drug Administration \$2 million a year.

DeMaria said NextSource moreover has a program to provide the drug free to people who lack health insurance. The Duke specialists, however, said the program's "stringent criteria" limited its availability to only a small minority of patients.

Lomustine, which acts to interfere with the DNA of the cancer cells, is typically prescribed in doses of 110 mg/m<sup>2</sup> every six weeks.

According to the American Brain Tumor Association, some 700,000 people in the United States suffer from a primary brain or spinal cord tumor.

Glioblastoma, in particular, accounts for 14.9 percent of all primary [brain tumors](#).

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