

# Access to high cost medicines: a systematic review of the literature

Philip Wahlster <sup>a,b</sup>, Zaheer-Du-Din Babar <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Pharmacy, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

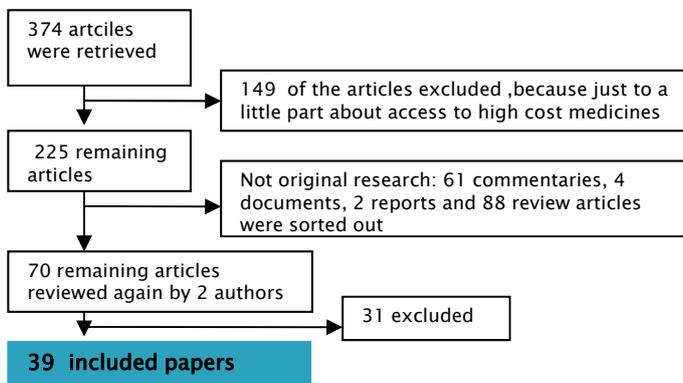
<sup>b</sup> Ernst Moritz Arndt University, Greifswald, Germany

**Background:** Healthcare systems in western countries face increased rationing of drugs and services due to the increasing costs. The objectives of this study were:

1. to explore the viewpoints and perceptions of different stakeholders
2. to explore the barriers to access and usage of high cost medicines.

**Method:** A systematic review was performed to identify all original research relating to access to high cost medicines. Causes of critical opinions were identified and strategies were suggested to improve access and the acceptance of access policies.

Figure 1: A schematic representation how the papers were selected



**Results:** Many stakeholders are concerned about a lack of access to high cost drugs. They worry that physicians might not consider certain medicines if they cause high out-of-pocket drug costs for patients. Patients want to be informed about all treatment options, however, even if they can't afford them. Viewpoints of the stakeholders (figure 3) and barriers to access (figure 4) were identified on several levels.

Figure 3: Viewpoints on access to high cost drugs

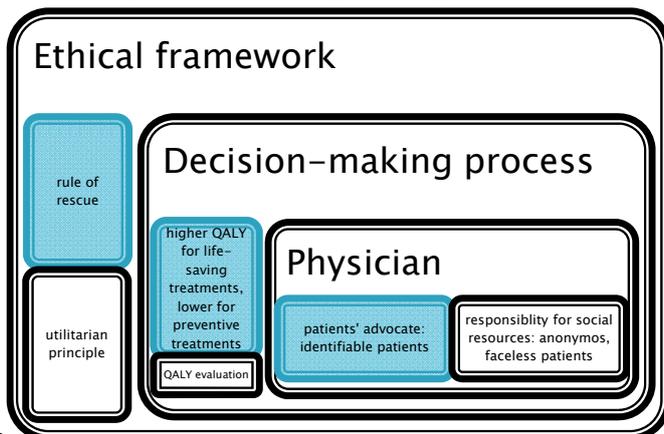
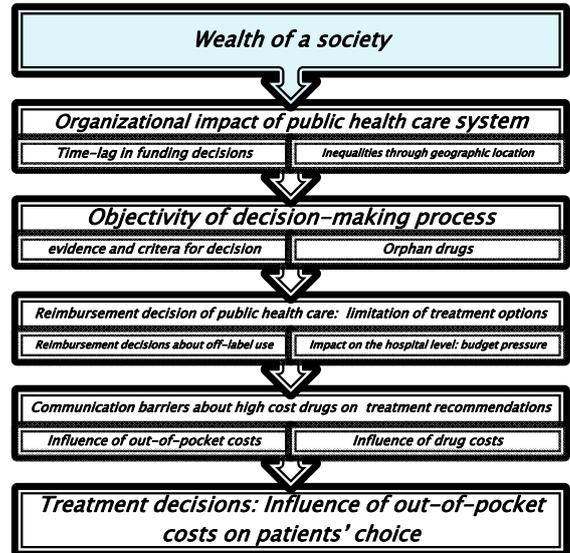
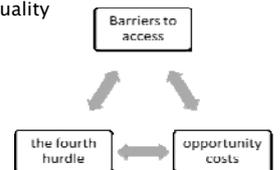


Figure 2: Study findings about barriers to access



**Conclusion:**

- Moral issues and "the rule of rescue" could have a big influence on the decision making process.
- The behaviour of physicians and patients are influenced by high cost drugs.
- Barriers normally lead to inequality
- Interdependence of access limitations, opportunity costs and pharmacoeconomics (Figure 4)



**Recommendations (Figure 5)**

