

### Rising Pill Costs Plague Elderly

*Governor: Canadian drug plan could save \$90.7M; senior citizens to benefit*

By Jared Goldberg-Leopold - The Daily Northwestern

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Addie Katz, 79, reaches into her pocket and pulls out a tattered Ziploc bag with about a dozen red, white and blue pills.

This is her "evening set." She takes other pills in the morning and two more at night. Katz, who just moved to the North Shore Retirement Hotel, 1611 Chicago Ave., spends more than \$150 a month on pills.

In Evanston, a city with a large population of senior citizens, Katz is relatively lucky, said Nancy Flowers, the city's long-term care ombudsman.

"I've worked with seniors who had to decide, 'Can I buy this medication this month? Because I can't buy it and buy my food and pay my rent,'" Flowers said. "That's a horrible choice to have to make, and it's one that people have to make every day."

But that choice could become easier as Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich pushes for greater accessibility to Canadian pharmaceuticals. Blagojevich released a study Monday that showed the state could save \$90.7 million by reimbursing state employees and retirees for prescription drugs bought in Canada.

Though it is technically still illegal to buy drugs from Canada, Blagojevich and U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Illinois, are spearheading a national effort to put pressure on the Food and Drug Administration to approve drug imports.

Blagojevich's efforts will help Evanston's seniors learn ways to get cheaper prescriptions and could directly benefit seniors who were state employees, Flowers said.

"People are really following this to see, is the governor going to be able to push this into an area where it's going to educate more people and also become something that people can really access?" Flowers said.

A spokesman for **U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky**, D-Illinois, who represents Evanston, said the import program would help defray drug costs, but America's prescription drug policy needs to be re-examined.

"It's a short-term fix to a long-term problem, and that is the rising costs of prescription drugs in this country," said Nadeam Elshami, a spokesman for Schakowsky, who supports the proposal.

Blagojevich's critics, including the FDA, have questioned the Illinois survey's assessment that Canadian drugs are safe for use in America.

But Flowers said she hasn't heard any complaints about Canadian drugs.

"My understanding is that the Canadian drugs have been through rigorous testing," she said. "I know that the people that I know that are using it, they've not had any problems with it."

Although Sherwin Gaines, 87, said he believes Canadian drugs are safe, he said he is content with his prescription plan. Gaines takes only two medications regularly, much less than the

average resident at the North Shore Hotel, where he has lived for four years.

"I'm sure that people my age would like to get drugs at a cheaper price," Gaines said. "I'm very much in the minority. I might be the only one here that says, '(My current plan) is not bad.'"