FDA Approved 44 New Drugs in 2014, Marking an 18-year High

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Last year, the FDA approved a total of 44 new drugs, making 2014 the best year for pharmaceutical innovation since 1996, Forbes reports.

Financial analysts say the 18-year high marks the end of a supposed “innovation drought” that hit the pharmaceutical industry between 2005 and 2010.

Last year, new infectious disease drugs dominated the approval market, earning 12 (27 percent) of the FDA green lights. Cures for the hepatitis C virus (HCV) accounted for two of these major breakthroughs.

AbbVie notched its first FDA approval since 2004 with Viekira Pak, its hep C combo treatment that is likely to achieve blockbuster status, thanks to a recent insurance coverage deal with Express Scripts.

Gilead Sciences also scored success with Harvoni (sofosbuvir/ledipasvir), a new one-pill-per-day HCV treatment that will be exclusively covered by CVS/Caremark.

Eight new cancer drugs were also approved last year, as well as four treatments for diabetes. Approvals during the last five years continue to be dominated by big pharma companies like Johnson & Johnson, GlaxoSmithKline and Roche. However, smaller companies such as Gilead, Boehringer Ingelheim and Biogen seem to be taking bigger shares of new drug approvals every year.

Analysts also credit the spark in innovation to the FDA’s new “Breakthrough Therapy Designation,” which fast tracks certain drugs for approval and reduces the cost of clinical research. During the past two years, the FDA granted 68 such designations to potential new meds, including the two new hepatitis C drugs.

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