

Washington DC (Nov. 30, 2011)—At a hearing today before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings questioned health and medical experts about “gray market” drug companies that buy and sell drugs in critically short supply at exorbitant prices.

“Nobody should be allowed to profiteer at the expense of cancer victims and other patients who are in dire need of these life-saving medications,” [Cummings said](#).

[During questioning by Cummings](#), a panel of expert witnesses expressed mounting concerns over these problems, including the skyrocketing costs of these drugs and serious questions about their safety:

- Dr. Michelle Hudspeth, Medical University of South Carolina: “What I’m afraid is that you’re going to set a hierarchy of treatment. If you’ve got the money to pay, obtain some drug, travel to Canada, you can get treatment. But the folks who don’t have the finances to do that are left behind. And who is that going to be? It’s going to be the kids.”

- Ted Okon, Community Oncology Alliance: “The problem is administering that drug without a set pedigree is very dangerous because you’re talking about extremely, extremely potentially toxic medications.”

- Kasey Thompson, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists: “Our members get contacted with offers to provide these drugs at exorbitant prices. ... Many pharmacy departments and hospitals will not buy from the secondary market at all, but as others have mentioned, sometimes there is no other option.”

Cummings [launched his investigation](#) in October after obtaining confidential information relating to companies that charge prices many times higher for drugs than those negotiated with authorized manufacturers and distributors.