



### Cancer Drug Shortage Affects Kids

Hospitals forced to ration drug that cures leukemia.  
01:58 | 02/10/2012



# CLINICAL PRACTICE ALERT

### Mass. panel to examine prescription drug shortage

February 11, 2012  
BOSTON—Prescription drug shortages will be the topic of a legislative oversight hearing on Beacon Hill.

The Public Health committee plans to hear from doctors and patients, hospital and pharmaceutical industry representatives, and an official of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration during Monday's Statehouse hearing.

Lawmakers say the shortages of prescription drugs have been increasing in recent years and are having a direct impact on patient safety.

The problem has been the focus of national attention.

In September, The Associated Press reported that at least patient 15 deaths since mid-2010 have been blamed on shortages of life-saving medications in the United States. ■

DIANA:drug-shortage-opening

### Indiana Representative Pushes Bill on Drug Shortages

By Chris Van (cvan@wibc.com)  
2/6/2012

Earlier this week, Representatives Larry Bucshon (R-IN) AND John Carney (D-DE) and introduced H.R. 3839, the "Drug Shortage Prevention Act," which, according to its sponsors, is intended to bring "more efficiency to the manufacturing and distribution processes" and to require "FDA to take action to prevent drug shortage problems before they begin impacting patients."

### Prescription Drug Shortage Affects Hospitals

Written by Whitney Wetzel  
Last updated on February 08, 2012 @ 7:59PM  
Created on February 08, 2012 @ 7:33PM



Pharmacists are experiencing shortages in many different types of drugs. The problem, they say, is with manufacturing. Most of the time what happens is either the strength or the generic version of a drug is unavailable. Often times, the patient's physician will then have to prescribe an alternative medication that may be less potent, or not as effective.

"We may have to contact the doctor's office and see what alternatives there are, as far as switching to something that is available," said Dr. Matt Pletcher, Pharmacist Rider Pharmacy.

This causes problems for the patient, because most of the time when a drug is unavailable, the alternative is more expensive

"Where somebody may use 60 of 'drug A', they may have to get 120 of 'drug B', and obviously that would make it more expensive for the patient," said Dr. Joseph Frederick, Pharmacist White Hall Pharmacy.

A common problem is that manufacturer's won't produce enough of the generic version of a drug, forcing patients to buy the more expensive, brand name drug. Pharmacists say they think the Federal Drug Administration should be more strict with the manufacturing process.

"The FDA has put restrictions on the manufacturers, on the wholesalers, and on the pharmacies, as far as how much they can order at a time. So, we've seen some of that happen with some of the medications," said Dr. Matt Pletcher.

Drug shortages create a serious and growing threat to public health and in some cases can even be life threatening.

While many across the nation have fallen into abusing prescription pain-killers, some people can't even get the life-saving prescription medications they need, because of shortages.

It's estimated that last year, 550,000 cancer patients had to miss or delay their chemotherapy treatments, because of shortages. Other drugs, including antibiotics that are commonly used for heart patients, have also been particularly hard for both hospitals and pharmacists to find.

"Right now, I think there's a nationwide shortage of prescription drugs in many areas. Most often, it's the generic injectibles. Right now, we've had quite a bit of problem within the last two years at this institution and other hospitals," said Paul Sheets, Assistant Director of Pharmacy, UHC.

An American Hospital Association survey found that almost all hospitals have experienced at least one drug shortage within the last six months. 30 to 40 percent of oncology patients at one hospital here in the Mountain State have been impacted by drug shortages. And another state hospital reported they were forced to buy an expensive brand name cancer drug, instead of the generic version, at more than 10 times the price per dose.

"There's probably several reasons. I think there's been some consolidation in the industry. Fewer companies are making the drugs, because there's not a big profit margin in generic injectibles. And if one company then has a problem with the factory, then there's nobody else to take up the slack and produce the medications," said Paul Sheets.

U.S. held a meeting with the Senate Finance Committee in December concerning this issue, saying "West Virginia hospitals have seen a dramatic increase in frequency and severity of drug shortages for the past two and a half years, but with no recourse. While hospitals and pharmacists have borrowed and shared when possible, many health care providers have had to cancel major surgeries and other life-saving procedures due to the lack of necessary drugs.

"It's difficult because it's a profit and loss type of a situation, so I think the government may have to step in and have more companies make the medication. But the companies need to be more responsive and ramp up their production when a shortage occurs," said Paul Sheets.

**PLEASE**  
do NOT open  
drugs (esp. those in  
short supply including  
midazolam & etomidate)  
until you need to  
administer them.  
Exception: cardiac arrest when  
using amiodarone, epinephrine  
& vasopressin.