Persistent Drug Shortages Hurting Patient Care

Drug shortages—from Avalide to Xeloda—are plaguing the nation’s pharmacies across all practice settings. Last year, a survey by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices found respondents “perplexed regarding why the United States is experiencing drug shortages of epic proportion that are often associated with third-world countries. Respondents clearly believe the public is severely impacted by this issue, and several suggest that the problem has risen to the level of a national public health crisis.”

Two new studies suggest the situation has only gotten worse. An American Hospital Association survey in July reported that 99.5 percent of hospitals experienced one or more drug shortages in the last six months. Nearly half the hospitals reported 21 or more shortages. Some 82 percent said that they had delayed treatment as a result of a shortage, and more than half were not always able to provide the recommended treatment. Others were buying more expensive alternatives. The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists also found that increasing drug shortages are impacting patient care. They are adding to the nation’s health care bill as well—about $216 million annually in labor costs just associated with managing shortages, according to the ASHP study. “More than 90 percent of respondents agreed that drug shortages were associated with an increased burden and increased costs today compared to two years ago,” the study said.

The Food and Drug Administration said shortages of prescription drugs have tripled during the last six years to a record high. There were 61 drug product shortages in 2005 and 178 in 2010. Community pharmacies are not immune to the shortages either, as recent shortages of generic Adderal XR attest. One place to get information about shortages, their cause, and expected duration is on the FDA website (drugshortages@fda.hhs.gov). It includes information on drugs to be discontinued. ASHP (www.ashp.org) also maintains a database in its extensive Drug Shortages Resource Center.

Adherence—It Only Takes a Minute

By Aakash Patel

Increasing medication adherence improves the quality and length of life; for example, it is estimated that better adherence to antihypertensive treatment could prevent 89,000 premature deaths in the United States annually. Providing more information to patients on their conditions and medications may increase adherence. Research by Harvard University showed a decrease in emergency room visits by 20 percent as more information was provided to the patients.

Pharmacists can explain the outcomes of the medication, motivate patients by explaining how the medication improves quality of life, and determine barriers that might exist for non-adherence. Take time to remind patients when their refills are due and ask them about their thoughts on pros and cons of the medication when they pick up their refills. Many times patients do not receive any information about their medications from their doctor, and often do not even know the reason for taking it. The lack of understanding and information regarding their...
THE AUDIT ADVISOR

DAY SUPPLY ON DIABETES SUPPLIES

Q: When it comes to diabetes supplies and the proper day supply, how much insulin, syringes, and/or test strips can be dispensed?

A: 1. Always submit the correct day supply when transmitting claims.
2. Use extra caution when dispensing multiple vials/boxes of insulin, syringes or test strips—this is an audit flag. DO THE MATH!!!
3. If the prescriber indicates “as directed,” call and verify maximum number of units, injections or tests per day for the patient and document on the hard copy.
4. Remember, you MAY DISPENSE UP TO, BUT NOT OVER a 30- or 90-day supply, depending on each patient’s plan.
5. Most plans allow one vial of insulin (up to the plan limit) for a 30-day supply or 28-day expiration date.

Potential Pharmacy Savings —Up to $900 per prescription

By Mark Jacobs, RPh, PAAS National®, the Pharmacy Audit Assistance Service. For more information call 888-870-7227 toll free.

Arrests Made in String of Pharmacy Robberies

Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials have announced the arrests of five men in a series of armed robberies of independent pharmacies in the Trenton, N.J., area in 2009–10. One of the hold ups in 2010 was of the Brunswick Pharmacy, where on April 29th of this year owner Arjun Reddy Dyapa, 52, was shot and killed in an attempted robbery. Authorities have not linked that slaying to any of the men arrested June 13. No one had been arrested in the Dyapa murder at press time.

The authorities said the group of robbers was loosely affiliated and stole thousands of prescription pain medicines for their own use and to sell. Eight pharmacies in all were held up, including one robbed twice within two months.

The year-long investigation was led by the Trenton Police Department with assistance from the...
FBI. Armed robbery in New Jersey carries a 10–20 year jail term for each offense.

**Another Group of Independents Join NCPA**

The Association of Northwest Pharmacies (ANP) has become the latest independent pharmacy organization to join NCPA. “We applaud ANP’s commitment to the vision of sustaining and growing independent pharmacies and their ability to serve their patients and communities,” said NCPA President Robert J. Greenwood, RPh. “We are excited to now have all ANP members joining NCPA to strengthen the voice of independent pharmacists in the Pacific Northwest and nationwide.”

“The board of the Association of Northwest Pharmacies chose to have all our stores become members of NCPA. This action was prompted by the legislative and educational efforts of NCPA,” said Joel Hadfield, RPh, Association of Northwest Pharmacies CEO.

**Glucose Monitoring Products Stolen**

Abbott Diabetes Care is working with the Food and Drug Administration, the FBI, and other law enforcement officials to recover a tractor-trailer shipment of blood glucose monitoring products that was reported stolen from a shipping carrier facility in Louisville, Ky., on June 19.

“Practitioners, pharmacies, and consumers are advised to purchase Abbott Diabetes Care blood glucose monitoring products only from well established, trusted, and reputable sources and to be aware that an unusually low price is often an indication that a product has been stolen,” the FDA said.

**Debit Card Swipe Fee Change Coming**

The Federal Reserve Board has issued a new regulation for debit card interchange charges, also known as swipe fees.

The regulation increases the fee cap from the 12-cents-per-transaction contained in a draft regulation to between 21 and 24 cents in the final version. (The current average swipe fee is 44 cents.) The regulation also delays implementation to Oct. 1, 2011, instead of starting on July 21.