Practical Tips

Drug Shortages: Resources for Assistance

Drug shortages create a number of challenges that can be quite difficult to combat. Some of those challenges include not knowing why the shortage occurred, when the shortage will be resolved, and how to treat patients needing a drug in limited supply. When faced with the uncertainties of a shortage, it is valuable to know what resources are available to provide assistance. The recent deficit of leucovorin demonstrated the difficulties in obtaining answers to the various questions surrounding availability and how a lack of information can create ongoing questions.

As news of the leucovorin shortage spread, some health care professionals questioned the validity of the reports as well as the nature of the deficit. There are many theories as to why shortages occur, such as high demand, production challenges, manufacturing delays, transportation/shipping obstacles, and contamination or other quality issues. However, with leucovorin, the drug manufacturers did not release specific details surrounding the reasons. With few details being provided by manufactures, concerns began to emerge on how long the shortage would last and how patients currently on leucovorin should be treated. In an effort to address growing concerns, ASCO published a clinical alert on the leucovorin shortage.

ASCO obtained specific information on the shortages from two reliable sources: The American Society for Health-System

Pharmacists (ASHP) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Both entities provide details on current and resolved shortages. The information provided by these two organizations is easily accessible and available to the general public.

- ASHP: <http://www.ashp.org/Import/PRACTICEANDPOLICY/PracticeResourceCenters/DrugShortages/GettingStarted/CurrentShortages.aspx>
- FDA: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/shortages/default.htm#Current>

The FDA provides manufacturer information, reasons for the shortage, and other general information. ASHP provides the same information in addition to estimated release dates. Both sites post ongoing updates when new information is released. The FDA offers providers the option to subscribe to a listserv, which e-mails updates and notifications of newly reported and resolved shortages.

The Web sites offered by the FDA and ASHP provide physicians, clinical staff, and office staff reliable information when drug shortages arise.

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