



FRANKLY SPEAKING ABOUT CANCER

Cancer Drug Shortages

Cancer Drug Shortages, What You Need to Know

Getting a cancer diagnosis and being introduced to your treatment plan can be overwhelming. Suddenly, your life may feel upside down and many uncertainties lie ahead. These feelings are a normal part of coping with a cancer diagnosis. However, for some people, these feelings can be made worse by newspaper and television reports about drug shortages. While a few drugs are in short supply, there is information available to help you understand what these drug shortages might mean to you. The information provided here will help you to understand more about this issue and offer tips for talking with your doctor should you be faced with this situation.

Cancer drug shortages can happen, but most of the time a solution is available.

— Erin Fox, PharmD FASHP



Support for Finding Information About Drug Shortages

Cancer Support Community (CSC)	1-888-793-9355
www.cancersupportcommunity.org	
National Cancer Institute (NCI)	1-800-422-6237
www.cancer.gov	
U.S. Food and Drug Administration	1-800-463-6332
www.fda.gov	



What are Drug Shortages?

Drug shortages happen when hospitals, clinics, or doctor's offices can't purchase the drugs they need to treat their patients. Shortages can be short term and are usually due to ordering or shipping glitches. Shortages can also last a long time. These longer shortages happen when there is a problem in the manufacturing plant and the drug is not available, or only a small amount is available. Drug shortages have become more common in recent years. The shortage of drugs (chemotherapy) used to treat cancer is a problem that began in 2010. While there are lots of media reports, not all chemotherapy drugs are affected and not all patients will be affected.



QUESTION:

Does a shortage of a drug mean no treatment is available?



ANSWER:

There are few cases where a shortage means that all of a drug is gone. Instead, there may be a smaller amount and treatment may get delayed. There are also other treatments in many cases.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines a drug shortage in the United States as "a situation in which the total supply of all clinically interchangeable versions of an FDA-regulated drug is inadequate to meet the current or projected demand at the user level." Doctors often define a drug shortage in cancer treatment as when a drug is not available and impacts whether or not a drug can be given; if an alternative drug is needed; or if the pharmacy has to prepare a drug differently. Shortages can be short term (1-3 days) or long term (months-years).

According to the FDA, drug shortages have become more common in recent years, seeing the number triple from 2005 to 2010 alone. Most drug shortages are sterile injectable drugs. Some chemotherapy drugs are sterile injectable drugs. There are several active chemotherapy drug shortages. While this may seem alarming to read, please keep in mind that not everyone will be affected.



Why do Drug Shortages Occur?

Drug shortages happen for many reasons. A company can have trouble with the way they make a drug, or the ingredients they need to make a drug. Sometimes manufacturers haven't followed FDA's rules and there is a delay. Some manufacturers stop making a drug for business reasons and there may not be another company to make the drug. The process of getting drugs to patients is complex and drug shortages have no one exact cause.



QUESTION:

Do shortages happen because of foreign manufacturing?



ANSWER:

Most of the shortages are happening in factories that are in the United States.



What is being done about Drug Shortages?

While there is no single or simple solution to solving the drug shortage problem, communicating with health care providers and patients is key. There are many efforts underway to tackle this complex issue.

These include:

- The FDA has developed a website (www.fda.gov/cder/drug/shortages/default.htm) which has information on current and resolved drug shortages.
- The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' website (www.ashp.org/shortage) tracks drug shortages and provides alternatives when available.
- The FDA has a shortage team that works to help manufacturers resolve whatever is causing the shortage problem. Sometimes they approve new drugs, other times they ask other manufacturers to make more.
- Congress passed the FDASIA law in July 2012 that helps the FDA avoid more shortages by requiring manufacturers to let the FDA know if they are having a problem that could lead to a shortage.



QUESTION:

Is the government aware of this problem?



ANSWER:

The FDA has a drug shortage team that works hard to prevent drug shortages.



What Can You Do?



Empower yourself by learning as much as you can about drug shortages and about ways to improve your overall well-being.



Learn about your cancer diagnosis, treatment, health care team, and ways to improve your overall health as you go through treatment. Talk to your health care team, ask for further resources and take steps in doing your own research. If you do not feel up to gathering a lot of information at this time, perhaps a family member or friend can help.



Call the [CSC Cancer Support Helpline](tel:1-888-793-9355) for more information and support at [1-888-793-9355](tel:1-888-793-9355). A Helpline Counselor trained in understanding drug shortages is there to listen and help you get informed. A Helpline Counselor can also help you prepare a written list of questions to share with your doctor as you decide which treatments might be right for you.



You are the expert in your cancer experience regarding how you feel, what is important to you and what you want. Ask questions about your cancer treatment to ensure that you are comfortable with the decisions you make and the actions you take.



Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team Regarding Your Treatment and Medications

- What is the stage, type and spread of my cancer and what does that mean for me?
- What treatments are best for me and why? Ask for specific drug names, and how the drug is given (i.e.: by infusion, orally, etc.)
- Are there any issues with drug shortages with my planned treatment? If so, what are my options regarding this?
- If there are concerns with drug shortages, will I need to seek treatment at a larger institution that may have more of a supply?
- If I am going to participate in a clinical trial, will a potential drug shortage affect the trial's progress or my eligibility?
- Is there a drug shortage coordinator at my institution that will be a part of my health care team?

Be Mindful



- Talk to your doctor if you are worried about shortages.
- In most cases, drugs are available, or a substitute is available.
- Your health care team is working together to minimize the impact of any drug shortages on your treatment.
- The number of chemotherapy shortages is decreasing, and is becoming less severe.

CSC Resources for Support

The Cancer Support Community's resources and programs below are available free of charge



Cancer Support Helpline®

Whether you are newly diagnosed with cancer, a long-time cancer survivor, caring for someone with cancer, or a health care professional looking for resources, CSC's TOLL-FREE Cancer Support Helpline (1-888-793-9355) is staffed by licensed CSC Helpline Counselors available to assist you Mon-Fri 9 am- 8pm ET. Our Helpline Counselors have been specially trained in answering questions about drug shortages and linking you to valuable information.



OPEN TO OPTIONS®

If you are concerned about a drug shortage affecting your cancer treatment, Open to Options® is a research-proven program that can help you prepare a list of questions to share with your health care team. In less than an hour, our Open to Options specialists can help you create a written list of specific questions about your concerns for your doctor. Appointments can be made by calling 1-888-793-9355 or by visiting the CSC website to locate a Cancer Support Community offering this service near you.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer®

Frankly Speaking About Cancer is the Cancer Support Community's landmark cancer education series, providing sound medical and psychological information for cancer patients and their loved ones. Information is available through books, online, and in-person programs. Visit www.cancersupportcommunity.org or call 1-888-793-9355 to order your materials today.

Affiliate Network Services

Almost 60 locations plus more than 100 satellites around the country offer on-site support groups, educational workshops, and healthy lifestyle programs specifically designed for people affected by cancer at no cost to the member. For a full list of affiliate locations, visit the Cancer Support Community website or call us toll free at 1-888-793-9355.

The Living Room, online

Cancer Support Community's "The Living Room" offers much of the same programming available at each CSC affiliate. On CSC's website you will find online support groups, discussion boards and social networking, "build your own website" services, and education materials for patients and caregivers.

These services are made available with generous contributions from CSC supporters. **To access these services, visit www.cancersupportcommunity.org.**

General Cancer Information, Survivorship & Support

Cancer Support Community (CSC)	1-888-793-9355	www.cancersupportcommunity.org
American Cancer Society (ACS)	1-800-227-2345	www.cancer.org
CancerCare	1-800-813-4673	www.cancercares.org
Cancer.net	1-800-651-3038	www.cancer.net
National Cancer Institute (NCI)	1-800-422-6237	www.cancer.gov
Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)	1-800-532-5274	www.patientadvocate.org



The Cancer Support Community and its partners provide this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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