

IT'S ABOUT PAIN

SHORT SUPPLIES

Every single day last month, patients complained that their usual pharmacy was unable to fill their prescription. “We’re out” ... or “it’s on back order” ... or “we can only give you one week’s supply” ... or “you’re taking too much” ... or “this dose is not reasonable for your diagnosis.”

To many patients, this feels like pharmacist harassment. And maybe it is; certainly, some pharmacists are rude and critical of doctors’ decisions. But in most cases, there is more to it.

Many pharmacists fear that their licenses could be in jeopardy if they fill too many prescriptions, or if a patient overdoses on pain medication they have dispensed. Others believe the “party line” that nobody should be taking opioids for chronic pain because doses will escalate and cause death from respiratory suppression. Or, worse, some may believe that patients are selling some or all of their pain medication.

However, the problem is more likely occurring at a higher corporate level on philosophical grounds (but they will still sell much more expensive alternatives, such as Xtampza) or from insurance company leaders that “will not pay for Oxycontin (or high doses of any opioid).”

Even more likely, though, is a shortage of pain medication from the wholesalers, based on Federal government mandates forcing manufacturers to reduce production.

So, what can you do?

- When you are coming in for refill authorization, call your pharmacy to see if they have your drug in stock. If not, call other pharmacies (like the other Safeway or Rite Aid), until you find one that can fill your prescription. At your appointment, tell us what you have learned, so we can promptly authorize it.
- Through consultation and careful planning with your clinician, consider creating a small “emergency supply” in case all pharmacies are out, so you do not go into withdrawal.

What can we do?

- We can work with you to arrange substitution of a comparable dose of a different opioid medication.
- We can advise non-opioid treatments that might help (supplements, cyanocobalamin injections, creams, non-steroidals, etc.) until pharmacies are re-stocked.
- Refer to a pain clinic for consultation, or possible spinal cord stimulator or morphine pump to reduce or replace pain medication.

PLEASE DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT buy any pain medication from street dealers. Despite their assurances, their opioids are often laced with fentanyl, which can kill you, or Xylazine, which before you die, can cause your skin to slough off and your muscles to rot.