

IT'S ABOUT PAIN

Mail Order Opioids Save Lives, But Aren't Perfect

Here are 8 cases where mail order systems failed. They are exceptions; usually all works well.

Case 1, Curtis. Over 20 years ago, trauma caused Curtis to undergo massive abdominal surgery, with removal of his pancreas, gallbladder, spleen, much of stomach, some of his liver. He's on dialysis now and he doesn't absorb meds very well. For 17 years, his dose of 11-12 methadone a day has served him well—good pain relief and no side effects. Recently his mail order pharmacy department declined to fill his meds, citing “dose and safety.” Curtis cut his dose in half and has been in withdrawal for over a week. He has lost weight down to 100 pounds. Yesterday, he fell and broke his pelvis and left hip. The hospital is unwilling to give him his usual meds. This mail order pharmacy is forcing Curtis to taper or discontinue- a clear violation of CDC Guidelines for Opioid Prescribing (2022) that state: doses should be individualized, taking into account benefits and harms. Pharmacies, health care companies, insurance payers, and government agencies are NOT TO FORCE PATIENTS TO TAPER OR DISCONTINUE effective opioid treatment. This company is in violation.

Case 2, Ken. Several failed back surgeries left this big man with severe pain, well controlled by moderate doses of oxycodone. After being rejected by 9 pharmacies in the past year, he went to mail order for reliable supplies. However, his supply did not arrive on time and 3 days later, he was in severe withdrawal and pain was level 10. A compassionate friend offered him an oxycodone. It made Ken feel weird and a urine drug screen disclosed oxycodone, fentanyl and methamphetamine. If Ken weighed half his 300 pounds, he would have died.

Case 3, Ronny. After losing script options from several retail chains, Ronny felt that the independent pharmacy pricing was too high so he went to mail order. The meds arrived almost two months after the agreed-to delivery date.

Case 4, Sally. Sally gets her mail order oxycodone regularly, but received a call last week, stating that the mail order pharmacy was out of oxycodone and didn't expect a shipment for 6 weeks or longer. Supply chain issues are due to Federal edicts during the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, which required manufacturers to reduce production by over 10% per year. This will get worse unless the new administration reverses course.

Case 5, Ella. Ella's pharmacy dropped all of our patients due to Exhibit P of the Distributor Settlement Agreement. So we sent the 'script to a mail order firm. They couldn't ship for 10 days due to supply shortages. Fortunately we found a pharmacy willing to provide a temporary supply till the FedEx brought her prescription.

Case 6, Lewis. Lewis gets his prescription from mail order but works long hours. The shipment of opioids required a prescription signature by the recipient but he was never home during “business hours” to sign. So it sat in the post office for 2 weeks because nobody notified him.

Case 7, Arnie. When he switched from a small pharmacy to mail order, the price of pregabalin went from \$40 up to \$350 per month.

Case 8, Robin. Robin ran out of oxycodone early due to aggravation of his neuropathy. While waiting to get his refill, desperation drove him to purchase 100 Fentanyl pills for \$40. Each pill took away ALL pain, much better than the reduced pain benefit of oxycodone. However, after 2 hours, the pain returned with a vengeance, so he took more fentanyl. Eventually taking over 8 a day, he became groggy and near death, so he stopped. For 2 weeks he suffered withdrawal far worse than that he'd experienced from going off oxycodone. Every movement, even swallowing or turning over in bed, caused excruciating body-wide pain. His mind raged. He knew that taking a fentanyl would relieve all symptoms, but he didn't dare... After the withdrawal dissipated, he felt exhausted “just like mono” for over a month.

Bottom lines:

- Order early. Call of us if shipment is delayed so we can find a “bridge fill” of 5-10 days of your medicine. Don’t take fentanyl or street opioids, even from a trusted friend.
- Tell our governor and attorney general candidates to contact distributors and arrange to delete Exhibit P from the Distributor Settlement Agreement.
- See us well ahead of refill date; we’ll place orders for a “delivery date” 7-10 days later. Without a specified date, patients may wait “on the queue” for weeks or even months.
- If you want to make a difference, contact candidates for Attorney General and Governor and urge them to rescind Exhibit P.

Gubernatorial Candidates’ websites

- Bob Ferguson <bobferguson.com>
- Mark Mullet <mulletforgovernor.com>
- Semi Bird <birdforgovernor.com>
- Dave Reichert <reichertforgovernor.com>

Attorney General Candidates’ websites

- Nick Brown <nickbrownforag.com>
- Manka Dhingra <electmanka.com>
- Pete Serrano <serannoforag.com>