

## **IT'S ABOUT PAIN**

### **UPDATE ON OPTIONS AFTER RETAIL PHARMACY CHAINS WITHDRAW**

As you know from last month's newsletter, the major retail chains have withdrawn from selling opioids for chronic pain patients, and I expect CVS and Walgreens to follow suit.

Fortunately, nine nearby independent pharmacies have agreed to accept "refugees" from the big retailers.

However, their capacities are limited and all must keep the overall percentage of opioid prescriptions to a minimum in order to continue to receive supplies from their wholesaler, Cardinal Pharmaceuticals. Therefore you must transfer all your prescriptions, not just the opioid. We are asking insurance plans to offer the same in-network low copays to patients using these out-of-network stores after being abandoned (which may violate insurance company contracts with the retail chains) by the large retail pharmacies.

If the worst possible scenario happens, and you can't get renewals, you can find a list of options (other than going through withdrawal) on the back of this page. Please do not even consider buying opioids from street dealers—almost certainly, you'd swallow pills containing Fentanyl, which is often fatal.

Meanwhile, if you know of anybody who has lost a family member or loved one, to fentanyl or suicide after being cut off from prescription opioids, please let our office know, or contact Dr. Stefan Kertesz at the University of Alabama—Birmingham (skertesz@uabmc.edu).

Here are the results of our survey on what our 525 chronic pain patients would do if cut off:

- Try previously failed treatments: 60%
- Try marijuana products: 60%
- Drink heavily: 14%
- Go to Mexico/Canada: 14%
- Stop activities & go to bed: 78%
- Buy from street dealers: 18%
- Try heroin: 11%
- Consider suicide: 28%
- Try street drugs/heroin, but not consider suicide: 10%

Bottom line: 28+10=38%; 38% of patients (200 patients) could die after being cut off.

Although nearly every one of our patients has complained about rude and/or accusatory treatment from multiple pharmacists at local pharmacies, the decision to cut you off has come from corporate headquarters: Walmart in Arkansas, Kroger/Fred Meyer in Portland, OR, Rite Aid in Pennsylvania, Safeway in Portland, OR and Seattle, WA, and likely CVS in Rhode Island and Walgreens in Illinois.

Please focus on finding solutions rather than expressing anger toward those corporations' pharmacists. If you want to file a complaint about any of this, you may contact the Washington State Pharmacy Quality Assurance Commission: 360-236-4700 or email [wspqac@doh.wa.gov](mailto:wspqac@doh.wa.gov). It's always worthwhile to share concerns with our Washington State legislators:

Senator Jeff Wilson, <[jeff.wilson@leg.wa.gov](mailto:jeff.wilson@leg.wa.gov)>

Rep. Jim Walsh <[jim.walsh@leg.wa.gov](mailto:jim.walsh@leg.wa.gov)>

Rep. Joel McEntire <[joel.mcentire@leg.wa.gov](mailto:joel.mcentire@leg.wa.gov)>

## **Options for Patients Who Cannot Obtain Prescriptions from Walmart, Rite Aid, Fred Meyer, Safeway, Walgreens, and CVS Pharmacies**

1. Change doctors.
  - Some pharmacies have told patients to do this.
  - Some prescriptions from our Physician Assistants have been accepted, but not all.
2. Continue efforts to change to independent pharmacies.
  - All require agreement to transfer all other scripts, to satisfy wholesalers.
  - Capacity of independents may change; our staff monitors this daily.
  - Change sooner because supplies may be delayed.
3. Go to detox center and start on Subutex.
4. Claim addiction and go to methadone clinics (sometimes \$50 per day for methadone).
5. Go into withdrawal and go to the ER.
6. Try to get a procedure from a pain clinic, especially if established.
7. Try to taper down slowly; 10% reduction per interval of time.
8. If you cease all activities because you are unable to get your prescriptions, keep in touch with us; independent pharmacies' supplies change.
9. Consider a change of opioid if pharmacy supplies are low.

### **Options for Alternate Pharmacies:**

#### ***Independent pharmacies:***

- Washington Hi-School Pharmacies (Cathlamet, Vancouver, or Woodland)
- Oregon Hi-School Pharmacies (Clatskanie or Scappoose)
- Castle Rock Pharmacy
- Cedar Village Pharmacy (Winlock)
- Centralia Pharmacy
- Chehalis Pharmacy
- Costco Pharmacy (Olympia, Vancouver, or Warrenton)
- Godfrey's Pharmacy (Kalama)
- Long Beach Pharmacy (Ilwaco)
- St. Johns Hospital Pharmacy

*\*Our staff will need to assist you if you wish to transfer to one of the above pharmacies.*

#### ***Mail order pharmacies:***

- CVS
- Express Scripts
- Optum

*\*Expect delays and hassles unless your MED is very low.*

**If you are a veteran, you may also go through the VA.**

***Do not buy from street dealers or try heroin or fentanyl. This is likely fatal.***