



**Section of
CLINICAL SPECIALISTS
AND SCIENTISTS**



Message from the Chair – August, 2011

Erin R. Fox, PharmD

Chair, Section of Clinical Specialists and Scientists (2011-2012)

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Dear Colleagues,

Last month I promised to keep you all updated on the activities and progress of our Section. However, August is a bit of a slow month as our groups are still getting together and planning out calls and we are eagerly awaiting our election results – please vote if you haven't already done so! Next month I will have more substantial updates, so for August I hope to inspire you with a call to action.

Over the past few weeks I have been talking to patients and clinicians all over our country who are directly impacted by drug shortages. I know you are having the same heart wrenching conversations that I am having about delayed or deferred treatments. When you think about it, the average consumer has no idea about the large number of drug shortages facing our country (a record-breaking 180 new shortages in 2011 as of July 31). Patients simply aren't learning about this health care crisis until they are directly impacted. The patients I speak to are incredulous that this is happening in our country. I applaud all of you who keep the story alive and help educate more average consumers by choosing to take time out of your day and get out of your comfort zone to talk to the press and appear on television.

I have followed drug shortages nationally since 2001. The magnitude of growth of the problem and impact on patient care is breathtaking, and believe it or not, a tremendous amount of progress has been made, but 2 key issues surrounding drug shortages remain the same. Manufacturers have no obligation to report a shortage to anyone, including their customers or the FDA. Manufacturers also have no requirement to continue to manufacture a medication, no matter how many lives depend on it.

We know our patients are being affected, unfortunately we have no idea to what extent. In some cases the lasting impact of a shortage may take years to determine. ISMP gave us a great glimpse into the safety issues drug shortages are causing with their survey in 2010.

<http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20100923.asp>

The road to a solution is the legislation that has been proposed in both the House and the Senate. Will this fix everything? No. Are these bills perfect? No. However, this is a great starting point and a method with a proven track record. FDA has prevented at least 38 shortages simply with voluntary communications with manufacturers, and the legislation is aimed at improving those communications.

ASHP has wonderful plain language, 1-page summaries of these proposals available at <http://www.ashp.org/DocLibrary/Advocacy/GAD/DeGetteRooney-bill-Summary.aspx> (House Bill) and <http://www.ashp.org/DocLibrary/Advocacy/GAD/Preserving-Access-to-Life-Saving-Medications-Act-.aspx> (Senate Bill).

I know it is horrible to have to tell a patient that they can't receive a treatment. It is difficult to tell a prescriber that a medication is not available. I am passionate about doing everything I can to alleviate the problem of drug shortages, and I have spent virtually my entire professional career doing just that. As pharmacists, the patient always comes first. My call to action for you all is to keep talking to the media and keep the story alive - particularly about the safety issues. Talk to your legislator. Have your patients talk to their legislator, have the physicians at your hospital talk to their legislator.

Keep up the good fight -

Erin R. Fox, Pharm.D.

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