In addition to their regular patient care duties, like working with the healthcare team to help manage and educate patients about their medication therapy in clinics and hospitals, pharmacists work every day to address the constant flow of new and ongoing drug shortages.

Pharmacy technicians and pharmacy buyers must determine:
- How much medication is on hand
- How long it will last
- Where it is located in the hospital
- Possible sources of alternative medications

When a medication is in short supply, it can:
- Change or delay medical procedures
- Limit treatment options
- Increase cost

If pharmacists find an alternative source of a medication, then there is no impact on patient care.
How Hospital and Health-System Pharmacists Manage Drug Shortages

The drug shortage response team

This interdisciplinary team is often led by a pharmacist and includes healthcare professionals like physicians and nurses. The team must evaluate any alternative treatment based on:

- **Safety**
- **Efficacy**
- **Availability**
- **Cost**

Changes to patient care processes

If the response team identifies an alternative product, then new procedures must be put in place throughout the hospital for:

- **Prescribing**
- **Distribution**
- **Preparation**
- **Administration**

AS THE MEDICATION EXPERTS, PHARMACISTS MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING:

- Placing restrictions on any drug(s) in short supply
- Determining financial implications for patients and healthcare organizations
- Identifying which patients should receive the drug in short supply and which should receive an alternative
- Identifying and communicating safety precautions with alternatives
- Determining financial implications for patients and healthcare organizations

What happens if there isn’t a substitute medication?

Communication

Once a drug shortage response plan is finalized, the team must communicate with all hospital or health-system staff including:

- **Pharmacy Technicians** who prepare the medications
- **Nurses** who administer the medications
- **Prescribers** who order the medications
- **Informatics Specialists** who manage electronic health records
- **Pharmacy Buyers** who purchase and maintain medication inventory
- **Medication Safety Team** which ensures safe medication use

For more information about drug shortages, including current shortages, visit ASHP.org/Drug-Shortages