



Branded Medicine Supply Problems Factsheet

Background

The issue of stock shortages including restrictions caused by quotas is a key concern for PSNC.

Over recent years, contractors have continued to experience difficulties in obtaining certain branded medicines. At the heart of the problem are changes in the European import and export market. A weak Pound and strong Euro have reduced the benefits from using parallel imported products; increasing the demand for UK medicines both from UK pharmacies and internationally. Some manufacturers have introduced quotas to better manage their supply of UK medicines to ensure patient access, however where stock hasn't been allocated correctly by the manufacturer or managed appropriately by the wholesaler, problems are arising.

Key manufacturers affected by this problem have introduced contingency supply routes for where quotas are exceeded and there is urgent patient need. These typically involve a pharmacy contacting the manufacturer and medicines being dispatched by the manufacturer directly to the pharmacy. This can lead to delays in patient care, increases in workload in pharmacies and can have an adverse financial impact on both pharmacies and the NHS.

Affected Products

On the PSNC website (www.psn.org.uk/brandedshortages) is a summary of the products that are most frequently reported. This list is not comprehensive. In some cases, manufacturers have resolved problems through their stock management policies, for example releasing more stock into the market where there has been a reduction in the availability of parallel imported medicines. New problems are arising as the dynamics of the market change. The list is regularly reviewed and updated however it is reliant upon contractors reporting issues to PSNC.

PSNC Work in this Area

There is no quick-fix solution and this is unlikely to be a short term problem. PSNC has sought to work with other representatives of the supply chain (including the ABPI, BAPW, MHRA and DH) to try and identify action that could be taken to help ease the situation and reduce the burden on contractors.

There was agreement from the representative bodies of all parties in the supply chain to support the promotion of the existing legal and ethical obligations in relation to the trading of medicines in short supply. There is an existing framework in legislation to control the appropriate and continued supply of medicines to patients in the UK. Both manufacturers and wholesalers licensed to trade in the UK have a legal duty to ensure that UK patient needs are met and pharmacists and dispensing doctors have ethical obligations to ensure the needs of patients are always put first.

PSNC maintains a list of products in short supply. The purpose of the list is to act as a signpost (linked to the legal and ethical guidance e.g. if a manufacturer has not put sufficient stock into the market to meet UK needs – action could be taken against them; if a wholesaler exports stock and as a consequence UK patients suffer - action could be taken against them, if a wholesaler was to export the products it could exacerbate the problem and possibly constitute a breach of Regulations).

Representatives of the supply chain oversaw development of the best practice guidance on the efficient supply and distribution of medicines to patients. The key points in the guidance are: (1) An expectation that, under normal circumstances, pharmacies should receive medicines within 24 hours; (2) Requesting faxed prescriptions prior to supply is not acceptable routine practice and where verification is necessary, dispensers should not disclose patient or prescriber identifiable details; (3) The importance of regular communication between manufacturers and wholesalers so that all parties have a good understanding of the supply and demand for particular products; (4) The need for all in the supply chain to have contingency arrangements in place to source supply where there are supply difficulties; (5) Prescribers should, where appropriate, consider a change in medication for patients and advise patients to request prescriptions in good time where there are supply difficulties.

Since the best practice has been published, representatives of the supply chain have been exploring methods of monitoring this guidance and its effectiveness, as well as possible solutions to supply problems. For further details see: <http://www.psn.org.uk/brandedshortages>

Financial Impact

Additional time spent sourcing products is accounted for via regulatory burden component of the total pharmacy contract sum while any impact on pharmacy purchase profit as a result of branded shortages will be accounted for in profit monitoring work conducted by PSNC and DH. For more information on the calculation of contract funding click here: http://www.psn.org.uk/pages/funding_negotiations.html

Support

PSNC continues to build evidence of the problems being experienced by pharmacies and patients. The latest information regarding branded medicine supply issues is available on the PSNC website.

To report any problems you are experiencing, please visit www.psn.org.uk/quota_feedback.php. Each month, PSNC sends a summary of this feedback to the manufacturers and wholesalers concerned and to the Department of Health to support their monitoring of the situation. This information really does help, for example, it has allowed us to identify weaknesses with certain manufacturer's contingency supply routes so that PSNC can pass this on to the manufacturer along with suggestions for improvement. The PSNC Information Team can also be contacted on: 01296 432823 (Option 1)