
EAHP: Drug Shortages Affect 86% of European Hospitals



A new report by the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP) reveals widespread medicine shortages that are affecting all countries in Europe. The top affected areas are medicines to fight infection, cancer drugs, and anaesthetics, the report says.

The EAHP report, which surveyed more than 600 hospital pharmacists in 36 European countries, found that 86 percent of respondents were having difficulties in sourcing medicines, with 66 percent reporting this as a daily or weekly problem.

Overall, 75 percent of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Medicine shortages in my hospital are having a negative impact on patient care." Hospital pharmacists also cited consequences for patients, including delayed or interrupted chemotherapy treatment, heightened *Clostridium difficile* risk, unnecessary side effects experienced by patients, and deterioration in patients' conditions.

"Two things always shock me about the medicines shortages problem in Europe: its scale, and the known impacts it is having on patient safety and welfare.... As our report makes it clear: medicine shortages are a cross-border health threat to patient welfare and the time for EU action is now," EAHP President Dr. Roberto Frontini said during the launch of the report at the Brussels Press Club.

In addition, hospital pharmacists pointed out the enormous costs in time diverted to sourcing alternative supplies, increased stress and confusion within safety critical working environments, the frequent high costs of procuring alternative medicines than those prescribed, and the cancellation of service improvements due to resources needing to be reallocated to deal with medicine shortages.

"We need improved systems for ensuring early reporting of medicines supply disruptions, with causes, likely duration and available alternatives notified to healthcare professionals," according to Dr. Frontini. "We need a step change in the recording of information about the problem. This could be addressed by the European Medicines Agency developing a database of medicines in shortage across Europe replicating that of its counterpart in the USA."

"We need criteria for a fair distribution in case of shortages based on patients' needs and not on commercial interests. Finally, we need an urgent sense of responsibility to be adopted by the European Commission in leading both investigation and resolution of the problem," the EAHP head said.

EAHP is an association of national organisations across 34 countries representing hospital pharmacists at European and international levels. EAHP represents and develops the hospital pharmacy profession within Europe in order to ensure the continuous improvement of care and outcomes for patients in the hospital setting. This is achieved through science, research, education, practice, as well as sharing best-practice and responsibility with other healthcare professionals.

In August 2011, EAHP officially became an International Not-for-Profit Organisation, adjusting its policy to better face modern challenges. Membership within EAHP is open to countries members of the Council of Europe.

Source: European Association of Hospital Pharmacists
Image Credit: European Association of Hospital Pharmacists

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