

## Address Severe Drug Shortages Impacting Patient Safety and Care

In recent months, the United States has experienced unprecedented drug shortages. Of great concern to physician anesthesiologists are shortages of injectable anesthetics and intravenous pain medications - drugs that are critical to ensuring that patients are safe and that their pain is managed during surgical and other interventional procedures.

It is imperative that Congress and the appropriate regulatory agencies reengage now on this critical public health issue and work collaboratively with key knowledgeable stakeholders, including physician anesthesiologists, for permanent solutions to these shortages.

For physician anesthesiologists, drug shortages directly impact patient safety and care. Having a diminished supply, or no supply of critical drugs at all, can cause suboptimal pain control or sedation for patients, in addition to creating complex workarounds for healthcare staff, leading to potential errors. Shortages have also resulted in delays and even cancellation of care.

Current drug shortages include local anesthetics and intravenous pain medications:

- **Local anesthetics are drugs** such as bupivacaine and ropivacaine that are used for epidurals, spinal anesthesia, and peripheral nerve blocks. These drugs numb regions of the body so that procedures can be performed safely, and pain is managed effectively.
- **Intravenous pain medications are injectable drugs** such as morphine, hydromorphone, and fentanyl that are “must have” drugs used in a variety of practice settings within hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers for the management of surgical pain. Some injectables, such as fentanyl, are also used for sedation and for anesthetizing the patient.

Intravenous pain medications should be distinguished from the oral opioid medications prescribed directly to patients, as these are injectable agents administered by physicians in the hospital and other acute care settings to prevent pain and supplement sedation during surgery or postoperatively.

### REQUEST:

Congress should reexamine the issue of drug shortages and request the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services convene key stakeholders such as the Food and Drug Administration, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, manufacturers and organizations that represent end users such as the American Society of Anesthesiologists for the purpose of developing long-lasting solutions to the drug shortage crisis.



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