



Date: March 27, 2020
Memo To: All Island Health Staff and Physicians
From: Richard Jones, Director, Pharmacy Services
Dr. Dean Kolodziejczyk, Medical Director, Pharmacy Services
RE: **Drug Shortage Mitigation Strategies During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Pharmacy Department routinely communicates mitigation strategies for managing drug shortages. These communications may be more frequent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many cases, mitigation strategies are easily integrated into practice and cause little disruption. In some cases, however, mitigation strategies may be more difficult to adopt because of clinical complexity and concurrent factors affecting care. For this reason, there needs to be clarity on expectations related to mitigation strategies.

- **Clinical Guidance** is a suggested approach to medication use that can help our organization make it through a drug shortage without significantly compromising care. The application of this guidance, however, remains at the discretion of the care team.
- **Restrictions and Therapeutic Substitutions** are policy interventions intended to manage a critical shortage. There is little opportunity for discretion because a given agent is no longer available or must be reserved for a clinically critical purpose that supersedes other potential needs.

Going forward, drug shortage communications will clearly indicate what strategies are guidance and what strategies are non-discretionary policy changes. In the case of the latter, the approval authority will be indicated.

Additional Background

Over the past ten years, drug shortages have evolved into a daily operational concern in health authorities throughout the country. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these concerns will intensify.

The Pharmacy Department has an existing structure and process to identify potential drug shortages and to develop, implement and communicate mitigation strategies. This team is operating at full capacity during the pandemic. Soon after the pandemic was declared, the clinical pharmacy team identified drugs of concern so the purchasing team could increase inventory of these agents. This approach has been ongoing for several weeks.

When Pharmacy identifies a potential shortage, routine management strategies include:

- Reallocating existing supply within the health authority to areas of greatest need
- Sourcing alternate brands, strengths or forms
- Addressing safety risks when these alternates are introduced into care areas
- Identifying clinically acceptable alternatives and ascertaining supply risk for those agents
- Engaging with clinical stakeholders to develop mitigation strategies to conserve supply
- Mitigation strategies might include clinical guidance, restrictions or therapeutic substitutions
- Communicating the overall management strategy to stakeholders

Please refer to the [COVID-19 page](#) or the [Drug Shortages page](#) on the Pharmacy INTRANet for communications related to drug shortages. Communications of particular importance for physicians will also be posted on the Island Health Medical Staff site.