HEALTH

Patients Face Cancer Drug Shortages

(NU) - The good news is that some drug shortages have been resolved, and many essential childhood cancer drugs are now more available. The root of the problem, however, persists.

For the past two years, hospitals have been hit with significant shortages of many generic drugs for several diseases, including cancer. In 2011 alone, there were at least 250 different shortages.

Pharmaceutical companies and drug manufacturers make less money off many of the older, generic drugs used for cancer treatment. But generally, most shortages are a result of manufacturing snags and production problems.

Improvements are being made; cooperation between drug manufacturers and the FDA has helped prevent many new shortages. But at large, oncology drugs for both children and adults are severely lacking.

Sandra Kweder, deputy director of the FDA’s Office of New Drugs, wholeheartedly agrees, “With regard to oncology drugs we remain extremely concerned about the shortages,” she said at a press conference held by the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

Although there are ongoing shortages of anesthesia, pain medicines and antibiotics, the scarcity of cancer drugs means that any shortage has a huge impact. Last year broke records – more than 200 cancer drugs were unavailable.

When an Ohio plant was shut down due to manufacturing problems last November, production halted on several critical drugs, including a preservative-free version of methotrexate – the key treatment for the common pediatric cancer acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

“The childhood cancer community was very concerned,” says Angie Hayes, Case Manager for The National Children’s Cancer Society (NCCS). “Childhood cancer patients and families shouldn't have to delay treatment because hospitals and cancer treatment centers ran out of medication.”

The Fight Against Childhood Cancer Continues

The NCCS has provided assistance to more than 30,000 children in the U.S. For 25 years, NCCS has grown and evolved with programs such as the Pediatric Oncology Program (POP), which has distributed over $54 million to families, and Beyond the Cure. This year alone, Beyond the Cure – a survivorship program designed to educate children and their families about the challenges they may face as childhood cancer survivors – has awarded $125,000 in college scholarships to 38 cancer survivors.

To learn more about the resources offered by NCCS, visit www.theNCCS.org.