



Canadian Epilepsy Alliance Demands Answers from Drug Makers Over Shortages

February 11, 2016 – The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance/Alliance canadienne de l'épilepsie is calling on drug manufacturers to take real steps to ensure patient safety and reduce shortages of anti-seizure medications, beginning with public disclosure of what is causing the shortages.

It is with tremendous concern that members of Canada's epilepsy community have watched the on-going problem of drug shortages develop over recent years.

“The seemingly endless situation of one or more anti-seizure medications being in shortage has significantly worsened over recent weeks,” said CEA President Deirdre Floyd. “Across the country the supply of an essential medication, divalproex sodium (Epival), has been hit by recent shortages. A major Canadian pharmaceutical company is out-of-stock on multiple epilepsy drugs. This needs to stop and that's not going to happen until we know why it's happening at all”.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance's call for greater commitment on the part of pharmaceutical manufacturers to addressing and explaining the causes of drug shortages follows years of increasing uncertainty in the supply of prescription drugs. Patients and pharmacists have often been left scrambling to fill prescriptions when unannounced or extended interruptions take place. For many people with epilepsy, interrupting medication or switching to a different brand can result in uncontrolled seizures and potentially serious health consequences.

While the Canadian Epilepsy Alliance has focused many of its efforts over recent years to ensure that patients, pharmacists, and physicians have as much notice as possible about shortages, the shortages themselves seem to be increasing in frequency and length, with no reasonable explanation. This is unacceptable.

Thousands of people across Canada rely on medication to control their seizures and the sudden change or withdrawal of those drugs can have devastating effects, including loss of seizure control, hospitalization, or even death.

“We believe that manufacturers with a licence to market a drug have a social responsibility to ensure a consistent, reliable supply of drugs that can have catastrophic results if patients are not able to access them,” added CEA Drug Shortage Committee Chair Suzanne Nurse.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance is also calling on all pharmaceutical manufacturers who are experiencing or anticipating shortages of their anti-seizure medications to not only provide notice but an explanation of the reason for the disruption. “It is only with relevant information as to the cause of shortages that manufacturers, governments, pharmacists, physicians, and patients can begin to understand and address the causes of shortages” says Nurse.

Inge Rylaarsdam, whose husband Richard needs one of the medications currently in short supply to control his seizures, knows first-hand how serious the shortages can be. Richard's epilepsy is not fully controlled. When taking his normal medication, he has seizures about two to five times per month. When Richard tried to respond to the shortage by switching to a different brand, his seizures increased to five to ten seizures per day putting his safety at risk and interfering with his ability to work.

“We are very fortunate that Richard is able to do so much and live life quite normally, being self employed on a farm, as long as he takes his medication and the right medication,” said Rylaarsdam.

“It seems as if pharmaceutical companies are not caring about lives at stake, and more concerned about making a certain dollar amount,” she said.

The Canadian Epilepsy Alliance/Alliance canadienne de l'épilepsie (CEA/ACE) is a Canada-wide network of grassroots organizations dedicated to the promotion of independence and quality of life for people with epilepsy and their families, through support services, information, advocacy, and public awareness. People can contact their local epilepsy agency by calling 1-866-EPILEPSY (866-374-5377).

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