



## MEMO FROM HPCCR

**March 3, 2009**

### **Important Information Regarding Opioid Shortage**

We would like to inform you of an ongoing national shortage of both extended and immediate release opioids. In January, 2009 ETHEX (a large supplier of opioid medications in the US) unexpectedly suspended all manufacturing and recalled 60 of their drugs and devices. Among the drugs recalled were hydromorphone, morphine, and oxycodone products.

Drug manufacturers that met their DEA quotas have had to temporarily suspend further production of these drugs. As a direct result, there is a national shortage of morphine extended-release tablets and other opioid drugs. This shortage has profoundly affected community pharmacies in all geographic locations. Many pharmacies have already depleted their supplies of various opioid strengths and formulations.

#### **Impact on Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region (HPCCR)**

Extended-release morphine is the long acting opioid of choice in hospices based upon pain guidelines and a myriad of studies supporting its efficacy and tolerability. Our hospice pharmacy provider, Hospice Pharmacia, has worked to stay ahead of this shortage and has secured additional supplies of many opioid products. Currently, however, Hospice Pharmacia cannot procure morphine extended-release 100mg and 200mg tablets. Long-acting opioid alternatives within our formulary structure include morphine extended-release 15mg, 30mg, and 60mg tablets, all strengths of fentanyl patches, and multiple formulations of methadone.

#### **Help HPCCR to Help Your Patients**

Currently, outside of the 100mg and 200mg morphine LA tablets, Hospice Pharmacia has an adequate supply of other opioid medications. However, accessing local pharmacies for opioid products may cause frustration as supplies dwindle. If prescribing these products for a HPCCR patient, please sign and fax narcotic prescriptions back to Hospice Pharmacia in a timely manner. This will help ensure that our patients receive efficient dispensing and delivery of these products.

We hope this information will prepare you to address any concerns from patients and caregivers. Thank you for your continued support of Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Sincerely,

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