

Generic stimulant shortage update: From bad to worse

Maxwell Zachary Price, BA, and Richard Louis Price, MD

Mr. Price is a first-year medical student, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, Nutley, New Jersey. Dr. Price is Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, New York.

Disclosures

The authors report no financial relationships with any companies whose products are mentioned in this article, or with manufacturers of competing products.

doi: 10.12788/cp.0343

Editor's note: Readers' Forum is a department for correspondence from readers that is not in response to articles published in CURRENT PSYCHIATRY. All submissions to Readers' Forum undergo peer review and are subject to editing for length and style. For more information, contact letters@currentpsychiatry.com.

(MZP) just completed my first semester of medical school. An important lesson imparted in my coursework so far has been to remain a staunch advocate for patients. Yet compared to the rigors of medical school, over the past year it has been far more difficult to help patients locate generic Adderall. Physicians were already overburdened with administrative responsibilities stretching into burnout territory well before the shortage, and now this! Unlike paper prescriptions of old, which patients could take to any pharmacy, e-prescribing apps require selection of a specific pharmacy, and controlled substances such as stimulants require 2-factor authentication. But if the designated pharmacy does not have the medication in stock, the entire process must be repeated with an alternative pharmacy, long after the visit has concluded.

To add insult to injury, the generic stimulant shortage has grown even worse. As of February 2023, generic Adderall remained hard to find and generic Concerta was also in short supply. How did this happen? In 1985, Bulow et al¹ coined the game theory concept of "strategic substitutes," where (for example) as beef becomes less readily accessible, consumers may switch to eating

chicken as their protein. Unable to locate generic Adderall, many patients have turned to generic Concerta as a substitute psychostimulant to continue management of their attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

In addition to the increase in demand, compounding the shortage is that one of the manufacturers of generic Concerta has discontinued production.² Branded methylphenidates and amphetamines, which are much more expensive than their generic counterparts, have remained in ample supply, but many insurers require trials of generics before considering coverage for more expensive brands.

Our approach to this situation

Each morning we call our local and chain pharmacies to take a census of their supply of generic stimulants. Some pharmacies refuse to release this information. Despite these census reports, we have found cases where patients have been turned away from pharmacies when they are not "regular customers," while patients whom the pharmacies know retain access as "members." Hence, a patient is unlikely to obtain these medications if their regular pharmacy is out of stock.

We want to share a workaround that has been effective. After unsuccessfully searching for generic stimulants at the patient's regular pharmacy, I (RLP) write "dispense as written" for the closest branded version and file a prior authorization with the patient's insurance company, noting "patient unable to trial any generic amphetamines or methylphenidates due to current



Discuss this article at
www.facebook.com/MDedgePsychiatry



nationwide shortage." Even with the most difficult insurers, the response has been "a temporary 3-month authorization has been granted," which is at least a small victory for our desperate patients and busy prescribers who are both struggling to negotiate a fragmented health care system.

References

1. Bulow JI, Geanakoplos JD, Klemperer PD. Multimarket oligopoly: strategic substitutes and complements. *Journal of Political Economy*. 1985;93(3):488-511. <https://doi.org/10.1086/261312>
2. US Food & Drug Administration. FDA Drug Shortages. Accessed January 7, 2023. https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/drugshortages/dsp_ActiveIngredientDetails.cfm?AI=Methylphenidate+Hydrochloride+Extended+Release+Tablets&st=d

Clinical Point

Compared to the rigors of medical school, it has been far more difficult to help patients locate generic Adderall