



Canadian
Anesthesiologists'
Society

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March 07, 2018

The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor
Minister of Health
Government of Canada

Dear Minister,

From time to time, Canadian Health Care is affected by supply disruptions of essential medications. If brief, or limited in scope, these supply disruptions may be of little consequence. Widespread and prolonged shortages, however, can be hazardous.

The Canadian anesthesiology community is currently experiencing effects of actual and anticipated shortages of several of our most commonly-used local anesthetic agents. These medications are used to perform nerve blocks for pain control, epidural anesthesia for pain relief during labor and childbirth, and spinal anesthesia for Cesarean section and other procedures. The shortages are posted on the Drug Shortages Canada website <https://www.drugshortagescanada.ca/> particularly under the searches “Bupivacaine” and “Ropivacaine”. The shortage of the Bupivacaine product “Marcaïne spinal” is a particular concern.

This is a significant safety issue affecting the services which we provide in many areas but will especially impact the care which we are able to provide for obstetric patients. Cesarean section is the most frequent elective surgical procedure in North America, and the supply disruption in the most commonly-used anesthetic agent for this purpose is already necessitating changes in practice. Even when alternative medications are available, changes in practice can lead to significant medication errors which present a hazard to patients.

I look forward to an urgent response from your office, outlining measures which you are prepared to take to alleviate this problem. In particular, as this problem is national in scope, I urge you to work with your provincial counterparts to identify the medications most critically affected, and to use your authority under the Health Canada Special Access Program <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/special-access/drugs.html> to approve importation and widespread distribution of alternative formulations.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Douglas B. DuVal, MD FRCPC
President