



NEWS RELEASE

Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EMS Association of Colorado and Congresswoman Diana DeGette Highlight Critical Drug Shortages

DeGette urges passage of bipartisan legislation in U.S. Congress.

DENVER – May 24, 2012 Randy Leshner, President of the Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado, joined U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette and other EMS professionals today to highlight the problem of drug shortages affecting emergency medical care. Ambulance services in Colorado and across the nation have reported that a number of drugs routinely used for emergency care at the scene of critically ill patients are now in shortage, jeopardizing patient care. DeGette is the author and lead sponsor of a bipartisan bill to address these drug shortages and improve patient safety. Two weeks ago that legislation passed out of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, as part of a larger bill, and will come up for a full vote by the U.S. House of Representatives in the next few weeks.

"Some ambulance services in Colorado have reported their supply of critical drugs is completely exhausted at times. When medical care, pre-hospital emergency protocols and the public depend upon them, these interruptions cannot be tolerated," said Leshner. "In 2010, 16,300 paramedics and EMTs from 218 ambulance services answered nearly 485,000 calls for an ambulance in Colorado. Shortages of life saving medications are at a crisis level for patients making these calls and unlike hospitals, ambulance personnel may not have access to alternative treatment options. Where options are available, carrying them is not always practical or safe. While the physicians who oversee care given by ambulance crews provide extensive training on the medications carried, unanticipated or frequent adoption of alternative medications can increase the risk of errors," he continued.

"The nation's drug shortage crisis is rattling our medical system and our families, because – as we see here today – it could affect any of us, at any time," said DeGette. "If you or a loved one suddenly faces a life-threatening health emergency, the ambulance you call or the ER you go to, may not actually have the drugs you need for treatment. The bipartisan legislation I wrote will create an early warning system so everyone from the FDA, to the drug companies, to the doctors here at Denver Health, to the Colorado EMS, can better respond to any shortage, quickly and efficiently, and make sure patients' health is protected. I strongly urge my colleagues in Congress to support this legislation in the coming weeks and give these medical professionals the tools they need to save lives."

"The issue of emergency medicine shortages is significant and has reached a point where it impacts all of us, including those who are most vulnerable. As emergency physicians, we applaud Congresswoman DeGette's efforts to bring attention to this issue so we don't find our patients caught in this dangerous, and very real, life threatening circumstance," said Dr. Christopher Colwell, Director of Emergency Medicine at Denver Health.

Rep. DeGette's bipartisan legislation to combat drug shortages sponsored passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee on May 10, 2012, as part of the Prescription Drug User Fee Act (PDUFA). The drug shortage provision language should improve patient safety by creating a communication framework to reduce shortages of life-saving drugs and give patients and physicians early warning of impending shortages so that they may adjust treatments accordingly. PDUFA, including the drug shortage legislation, passed the Committee unanimously.

Early reporting to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently proven to go a long way towards addressing these shortages and protecting patients. Since November, 2011, because of mostly voluntary reporting from manufacturers, the FDA has prevented 128 shortages.

Rep. DeGette's legislation creates an early warning system between the FDA, drug companies and medical professionals so that the community can respond to a drug shortage quickly and efficiently. Specifically it would:

- Requiring manufacturers of prescription drugs, including biologics, to notify the FDA of any discontinuance or interruption in the production of a drug at least six months in advance or as soon as practicable;
- Instructing the Secretary to distribute this information to appropriate health care professionals and patient organizations; and
- Authorizing the GAO to conduct a study to examine the causes of drug shortages and issue recommendations on how to prevent or alleviate a drug shortage.

According to the National Association of State EMS Officials, nearly one-half of the drugs on a recently released FDA list of pharmaceutical shortages are routinely used for emergency care at the scene and en route to the hospital in an ambulance. These medications are used to treat cardiac arrest, life threatening cardiac arrhythmias, protracted seizures, severe allergic reactions and pain. Patients with emergency medical conditions should be assured that the EMS professionals who respond to their calls for help have access to these medications.

Recent data from the University of Utah Drug Information Service showed that 2011 had 56 more incidents of drug shortages than 2010, with a total of 211 life-saving medications suddenly unavailable. In emergency medicine, both EMS workers and ER doctors are currently coping with shortages of medications that treat everything from cardiac arrests, to seizures, to heart rhythm problems, to life-threatening allergic reactions, to severe pain, to brain swelling after injury, among others. In many instances, no safe alternatives to these drugs exist, leaving patients with an increased risk of side effects and adverse drug interactions.

About the Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado

EMS is a critical component of our nation's and communities' safety net, proudly serving alongside rescue, fire and law enforcement professionals. The Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado is a professional association of paramedic-, intermediate- and basic- level emergency medical technicians and EMS first responders, physicians and nurses who treat victims of traumatic injury and medical emergencies; and EMS agencies, administrators, dispatchers, researchers and educators. EMSAC's 3,200 members work or volunteer for ambulance services, air-medical services, fire departments, hospitals and clinics, search and rescue teams, ski patrols, military medical or rescue units and medical training institutions. For more information about EMSAC, please visit <http://www.emsac.org>



Representative Diana DeGette (CO-1) listens to EMS Association of Colorado President Randy Lesher talk about how drug shortages have compromised ambulance services' ability to treat patients.