To: All Contra Costa Paramedic Provider Agencies

From: Joseph Barger, MD
EMS Medical Director

Subj: Medication shortages and current Zofran (Ondansetron) shortage

Recently a number of issues have arisen concerning availability of many drugs we use in our treatment guidelines. This is a particular issue for many generic drugs for a number of reasons, and the number of companies producing these drugs is quite small. When production problems occur or demand is greater than anticipated, shortages and back-orders may occur.

Currently the supply of Zofran (Ondansetron) in both parenteral and oral forms has become limited. American Medical Response has informed me that their supply is now exhausted. There has also been a recent shortage of Versed (Midazolam) which may affect some providers more than others based on cycles of expiration dates. A number of other drugs, including Atropine, Diphenhydramine, Morphine and Naloxone have also had recent shortages.

With regard to Zofran in particular, it is a very helpful medication, but its purpose is symptom relief and is not a critical life-saving intervention. Because other anti-emetic drugs carry significant potential for side effects (a reason we didn’t use any agent before), we will not be seeking replacement of Zofran with another drug for the treatment of nausea and vomiting. If a provider agency does not have any supply available, at this point, treatment guidelines should be followed otherwise without Zofran administration. Please inform our office if your organization is experiencing or anticipating a shortage of this medication.

For each drug shortage, there may be specific strategies to replace the drug with another agent, utilize a different dosage/concentration form or simply not use the drug until supplies are available. I will provide guidance on each situation as it arises.

At this point, I am requesting that any provider agency that anticipates a shortage of medication give our agency early notice (hopefully weeks rather than days or hours) when a potential problem is identified. Each provider should understand the EMS Agency will consider a variance in medication supply requirements if truly necessary based on actual supply conditions. Any request for variance should be submitted in writing to our office. Short of that variance, providers should work with their suppliers (or establish additional vendor relations) to manage inventories and address shortages within capabilities. Providers may also be able to work with each other to help manage inventories.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.