Children's Hospitals Disproportionately Impacted

Children's hospitals have long dealt with shortages of critical drugs that patients rely on for treatment and recovery. Research by the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) and Vizient finds children's hospitals are disproportionately impacted by drug shortages, compared to the 300-plus other hospitals in the Vizient group purchasing organization.¹ Key findings include:

- Children's hospitals experience the greatest number of drug shortages.
- Shortages affect essential drug categories—including lifesaving electrolytes, antineoplastics, and plasma products used to treat critical conditions such as sepsis, cancer and immune deficiencies.
- Children's hospitals spend more hours managing shortages than other hospitals—51 hours compared to 36 hours per drug shortage. As a result, they're twice as likely to report hiring additional technicians and purchasing staff, and four times as likely to report hiring additional pharmacists to manage shortages. This additional time is often dedicated to specially formulating the drug makeup and sizing for pediatric use.
- Children's hospitals report that, on average, the cost to manage one drug shortage from onset to correction is estimated at $50,000, in addition to the actual cost of the drug itself.

Patient Care Affected
Drugs intended for children are unique. Many of the drugs administered to children come in pediatric formulations to support safer dosing, such as oral liquid or reduced concentration. These pediatric formulations are often the first affected by shortages and are harder to find as smaller amounts are made due to a reduced market need.

Furthermore, when a drug is in or nearing shortage, important patient procedures may be delayed or even canceled. Sometimes the location of care must abruptly change—drugs intended to be administered in a community or remote setting close to a child’s home may have to be moved to the main hospital to maintain a controlled supply. Shortages can also affect a patient’s medication adherence, since not all drugs can be easily switched to similar products.

Children’s Hospitals’ Strategies and Solutions
Children’s hospitals work continuously to prevent shortages by seeking additional manufacturing and distributing solutions, working with manufacturers to prioritize pediatric formulations, and frequently monitoring the market for changes.

When a hospital can no longer find the ideal product for their patients, children’s hospitals use drug shortage task forces and enhanced procedures to ensure patients get the most optimal care available. This includes:

• Centralizing distribution of the drug.
• Assessing, purchasing and deploying alternative products, if safe for the patient.
• Building strategic partnerships with 503B pharmacies that enable alternative dispensing options to reduce gaps in care.
• Updating electronic medical record systems.
• Broadly communicating changes to patients, families and health care team to accommodate patient safety goals.

The Role of Lawmakers and Regulators
Children’s hospitals face daunting barriers as they attempt to prevent or mitigate shortages that can harm kids. To better support patient care delivery in children’s hospitals, there are actions that supply chain professionals, in partnership with lawmakers and regulators, must swiftly take:

• Ensure additional transparency within the supply chain including the location of production. The absence of this information hinders proactive steps to prevent and mitigate shortages—especially during natural disasters and other emergencies.
• Expand the FDA drug shortages list to better account for pediatric populations and pediatric drug formulations.
• Implement policies that reduce the risk of drug shortages by encouraging competition in development of pediatric products that are often sole sourced.