



Queen's  
UNIVERSITY

78 Barrie St  
Kingston, Ontario  
Canada K7L 3N6  
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We are concerned about the growing shortages of generic drug products – some of which have been available in Canada for four decades or more. They include prochlorperazine (Stemetil), tetracycline, metaclopramide (Maxeran), amitriptyline (Elavil)—reliable drugs that have withstood the test of time as effective, safe and affordable. Is aspirin next?

Pharmacists tell us that they don't know why the drugs are unavailable. Some cite the closure of a American manufacturer for "not being up to standard." Others opine that the substrates originating from Asia are difficult to find for some obscure reason that did not affect a more closed trading era in the past. Still others suggest that interest in stocking these remedies declined with the recent change in the Ontario drug law curbing the cost of generics; they go so far as to suggest that certain pharmacy retail chains influence the stock of their wholesalers. We cannot help but wonder if big pharma is somehow behind this vanishing of cheaper remedies—especially when a more expensive substitute is recommended.

What is happening? Someone knows the answer. If the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers of Canada continues in its claim that drugs are a good way to save on health care costs, then it needs to be working quickly to make these reliable, affordable remedies available once again. And government needs to ensure that it does and that the causes of these shortages are not criminal.

Citizens deserve an explanation and our patients deserve the benefit of these remedies.

Jacalyn Duffin, M.D., F.R.C.P.(C), Ph.D.  
Professor Hannah Chair in the History of Medicine  
duffinj@queensu.ca

M. MADHANKS MD MRCPC  
CHAIR ALZHEIMER DISEASE SITE GR  
ONCOLOGY CENTRE OF SOUTH EASTERN  
ONTARIO

Richard Gregg, M.D., F.R.C.P.(C),  
Medical Oncology  
Richard.Gregg@krcc.on.ca

M. MATES, MD, FRCPC  
CANCER CENTRE OF SOUTHEASTERN  
ONTARIO

Jim Biagi  
medical oncology

Rupa Patel MD  
Rupa Patel MD, FCFP

JOSE MONZON  
MD, FRCPC, Ph.D.  
TRANSLATIONAL FELLOW

N. Hammad, M.D. MSc  
Cancer Centre of Southeastern  
Ontario

Heather Ostrick  
Heather