

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Should We Draw on Pharmacists’ Expertise to Manage Drug Shortages in Hospitals?”*

Guest: Michael Ganio, PharmD, MS

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Michael Ganio, the senior director of pharmacy practice and quality at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists in Bethesda, Maryland. He’s here to discuss his article, “*How Should We Draw on Pharmacists’ Expertise to Manage Drug Shortages in Hospitals?*,” in the April 2024 issue of the Journal, [Global Medical Supply Chain Security](#). Dr Ganio, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

DR MICHAEL GANIO: Oh, thank you for having me.

[00:00:47] HOFF: So, to begin with, what is the main ethics point of your article?

GANIO: Well, I think the challenges with drug shortages and supply chain issues that we’ve experienced, it can lead to inequitable access to drugs for patients. And we’ve seen some of the larger health systems can really employ the full resources of their organization to procure drugs to compound medications. And that can mean that smaller organizations maybe don’t have those resources, and therefore, there’s more difficult decision making that has to go on. And really at any organization, despite the size, even those with more resources, there are still difficult decisions that have to be made about which patients may receive a treatment and which ones may be switched to an alternative. So, I think being aware of why these shortages occur, the implications on patient care, it’s helpful for any clinician as they progress through their career to understand the importance of advocacy and understanding the roles of different agencies or health care organizations, professional societies, etc., in trying to mitigate the impact of these shortages, providing resources, and advocating for changes to our drug manufacturing and approval process for hopefully ending these shortages.

[00:02:11] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees specifically to take from your article?

GANIO: Well, specifically for students and trainees, I think understanding in their learning experiences to really rely on the pharmacist and their knowledge of medications. And when we are announcing that there is a shortage, I know there’s a lot of communication that can come out in the hospital, and they can be overwhelmed with information. But if we’re announcing a shortage, it means that we’ve already tried most of the steps to mitigate the impact of that shortage. So, within the pharmacy, as detailed in the article, there are a lot of steps we can do to try to preserve access to the medication. If it’s getting to the point where we have to ask clinicians to change the way they’re practicing, they can rest assured that we’ve already done every intervention possible to try to prevent that step. And then when they get to that point where they do have to start making some clinical decisions, lean on their pharmacists for an

understanding of what's the best therapeutic alternative? What's the best way to manage this patient without maybe that first-line or second-line agent?

[00:03:21] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

GANIO: I think really getting into the root causes of shortages. So, the article talks about mitigating the impact of shortages and how pharmacists are already doing some of these things, but we really don't delve into those root causes and why we're experiencing these shortages and the importance of clinicians, and anyone really who's purchasing drugs or prescribing drugs, to understand why we're experiencing these shortages. The quality in manufacturing that we have aging facilities, we have complicated manufacturing processes specifically for generic sterile injectable medications which are most susceptible to shortage. And so, when clinicians begin to pull back the layers of the onion and understand why we're having these shortages, it really helps when making purchasing decisions to understand quality. And unfortunately, there's not a lot of transparency into quality, so as purchasers looking through which products to buy, it's often based on price. And if there ever becomes more available information about quality and manufacturing, really pay attention to that. Not necessarily the location of where things have been made, but the quality, maybe the track record of that manufacturer, of that facility. [theme music returns] And that's one of our advocacy points, is to try to get more transparency into quality so that purchasers have that information.

[00:04:49] HOFF: Dr Ganio, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today and for your contribution to the Journal this month.

GANIO: Thanks again for having me.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.