

Rep. Pocan: Demands transparency on sedative shortages for patients on ventilators

Posted on Tuesday, Apr 7, 2020

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MADISON, WI – After [reports](#) this week that hospitals nationwide are suffering [shortages](#) not only of ventilators, but of the sedatives required for patients on ventilators, **U.S. Representative Mark Pocan (WI-02)** today sent a letter to Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Stephen Hahn and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar questioning whether the administration has knowledge of potential drug shortages for specific drugs that patients need when placed on ventilators—including sedatives—and if so, why haven't they made those shortages known to the public.

When Congressman Pocan had previously questioned Commissioner Hahn in a hearing about sedatives shortages [last month](#), the Commissioner noted that he was “aware of pressure on the system” but that he would “alert the American public” should there be any shortages.

Neither the American public or Congress has received any indication from this administration about these shortages. This administration has a duty to be transparent and forthright with the people in this country:

Dear Secretary Azar and Commissioner Hahn:

I write with great concern about possible shortages of critical drugs needed to treat patients with severe cases of COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, when Commissioner Hahn testified before the House Appropriations Committee, I asked you specifically if there were shortages of the drugs used to treat people on ventilators. At the time, you said, “you were aware of pressure on the system” and that you would “alert the

American public” should there be any shortages.

However, as the pandemic continues to spread and multiple states are expected to see a surge in infections over the coming weeks, it has been reported that there are shortages of the very drugs needed to treat patients suffering from COVID-19.

The American Hospital Association expects almost 1 million Americans will need to be placed on ventilators as a result of the coronavirus. As you know, there are specific drugs that patients need when placed on ventilators, including sedatives. Due to the rapid pace at which this infection has spread across the country, it has been reported that there was a 50 percent increase in demand for these drugs.³ Hospitals and long-term care facilities are reporting shortages, which may negatively impact our ability to keep more Americans from dying due to the coronavirus.

I request responses from you both to the following questions regarding this urgent matter:

1. Is the federal government aware of any drug shortages or potential shortages for drugs used to treat critically-ill COVID-19 patients, including sedatives for patients placed on ventilators? If so, what drugs?
2. What actions have the FDA and HHS taken to relieve shortages in the supply chain of drugs used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients?
3. Are your agencies actively working with health systems around the country to provide guidance on use of sedative alternatives?
4. Are there any new authorities that the FDA has identified it needs in order to ensure our medical system can meet the increase in demand for drugs used to place patients on ventilators?
5. Are there plans in place to increase domestic production of these drugs?

We urge you to work with drug manufacturers and their supply chains to prevent any future shortages.