

*The following Action Alert comes from the
Iowa Epilepsy Foundation*

BACKGROUND:

The Epilepsy Foundation continues to work on passing the Epilepsy Patient Safety bill. This legislation is very important to people living with epilepsy. It will ensure epilepsy patients are not exposed to an increased risk of seizures. The bill would require a pharmacist to get prior approval from both the patient and the prescribing physician before any changes in medication are made. It is critical for epilepsy patients to have access to the exact drugs that have been proven to work for them, whether those drugs are new or old, name-brand or generic. Even switching between two versions of the same generic AED can cause unexpected seizures. If a pharmacist is allowed to substitute one drug for another, the person with epilepsy is placed at risk of breakthrough seizures, ER visits, admission to hospital, seizure related injuries, and even death. As you can see, the human and financial costs of these occurrences have the potential to be monumental. It is the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) position that physicians should be able to prescribe the AED that will work best for the person with epilepsy without fighting barriers such as possible drug substitutions.

The way the law stands now, even if the physician disallows substitutions on the initial filling of the prescription, pharmacies can switch to a different formulation of the drug when the prescription is refilled. Nothing requires that the doctor approve that switch or even know about it. Any changes to AEDs can have a significant impact on epileptic patients and could cause extreme side effects such as breakthrough seizures.

TAKE ACTION:

Legislative language that addresses this issue and requires prior approval is currently in the Health and Human Services (HHS) legislation; HOWEVER, there is a significant effort on behalf of the pharmacists to remove our patient protection language from the bill. The HHS Committee members **MUST HEAR** from the epilepsy community on this issue just as they have from the pharmacists. The HHS leaders have taken a huge leadership role in offering and driving forward this important policy legislation, now they need our help to keep the language in the bill. Each of these members needs to hear from us to be able to understand the importance of this legislation to epilepsy patients and their families in Iowa.

Please contact the legislators listed below with the following messages AS SOON AS POSSIBLE on Wednesday April 2. Please always remember to personalize your message by telling your story.

Suggested Message To Legislators:

EMAIL SUBJECT LINE: Patient Safety language at Risk in HHS Appropriations Bill.

Thank you for addressing the safety issue that patients with epilepsy are facing in Iowa by including in the Health and Human Services Appropriations bill language that will not allow epilepsy patients to have their anti-epileptic drugs (AED) switched without their knowledge or the permission of their physicians.

This legislation may seem like a small matter when compared to the number of high-profile issues you must deal with on a daily basis. However, this issue is significant in size to those thousands of Iowans living with epilepsy because it will help ensure epileptic patient safety and reduce the risk of seizures in managed patients thereby reducing the financial burden on the health care system.

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy stated in a February 2008 article that in some more sensitive populations medical experts say slight variations can make a major difference in patient health and safety. The article goes on to conclude that individuals with epilepsy are one of the most sensitive populations stating that without a physician's involvement in the decision to switch from one drug to another, no one at the pharmacy counter is considering the possibility of the existence of comorbidities and that for many drugs, especially those with a narrow therapeutic range monitoring is necessary to assure the desired clinical response.

On behalf of our family, who has been so devastatingly effected by epilepsy, we thank you for recognizing the importance of this patient safety and access to care issue by including this language in the bill. We understand that there is an effort to remove this important PATIENT SAFETY legislation. We are asking you to please reject any efforts to strike the epilepsy patient safety language from the bill unless the Iowa Pharmacy Association has come to the table to discuss a potential compromise.

We sincerely thank you for your consideration of this issue that impacts our family.

TALKING POINTS:

- This legislation is NOT about switching, it is about the Doctor being informed and a part of the decision making process of what medicine a patient should be on.
- EF is not against generics, we are for the medicine that works and doctors need to make that decision.

- The AAN has evidence-based guidelines on appropriate usage of AEDs in treating epilepsy.
- Restricting access and switching antiepileptic drugs harms patients and costs money.
- Patients with epilepsy face unique medical challenges, thus they need to be carefully managed.
- The fail first approach to AED use is inappropriate.

**Please contact the following people if you have any questions.
Thank you for your immediate attention to this important
request!**

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