

Causes of medicine shortages

Regulatory problems

Supply chain difficulties

Increasing demand

Some companies have scaled back volumes, with finite capacity prioritised for other international markets. **Celltrion**, the biosimilar manufacturer of the off-patent breast cancer drug **Herzuma**, has signalled a ceasing of supply should VPAS continue unchanged²⁶. Although there are other producers of off-patent alternatives, they may not be able to fill the vacated market share or may themselves be forced to reduce supply in the UK due to more favourable market conditions in other countries.

The resulting risk to patients is manifest; the five-year survival rate for women treated with Herzuma is 97%.

In recent years, medicine supply shortages have increased in the UK, particularly for hormone replacement therapy (HRT), an off-patent branded treatment. This was, in part, driven by a sudden and unexpected increase in demand.

BGMA's monthly supply issues dashboard, charting primary and secondary care supply issues on the Specialist Pharmacy Service's online medicine supply tool, shows that nearly 100 products are facing supply issues²⁸, most of which are off-patent medicines. Of those, branded generics make up 48%.

Last year The Pharmaceutical Journal highlighted the risks to patient safety, a situation that still exists and could get worse.

“More than half of pharmacists warn medicine shortages have risked patient safety in the past six months. Results from The Pharmaceutical Journal's annual salary and job satisfaction survey show that 54% of UK-based pharmacists said medicines shortages have put patients at risk in the past six months.”

Article at: <https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/news/more-than-half-of-pharmacists-warn-medicine-shortages-have-risked-patient-safety-in-the-past-six-months>

The impact of medicine shortages can drive additional resource burdens on local health systems. A recent example from a Local Pharmaceutical Committee in the North-East demonstrated that pharmacists could spend up to 12 hours a week sourcing replacements due to medicine shortages. In addition, community pharmacies sometimes do not receive full reimbursement quickly enough for the alternative medicine, and this has a significant impact on contractor cashflow.