

Taking the hassle out of locating orphan drugs

by Leslie Morgan



Leslie Morgan

So you need to buy an orphan drug to treat a rare disease. You need a product that's been discontinued. You're having trouble locating a drug because there's a local supply problem. Or you need a medicine that has been launched in Europe or the USA but isn't registered in your country. You ask your local wholesaler to order it for you, but they can't meet your needs because the request is so unusual or perhaps they don't have the right contacts or set-up to manage a complicated order.

What are your options? First of all you need to find the product from abroad. But what if you can't speak the native language (Italian or German, for example)? And can you really be certain that you'll ever receive the product if you have to pay in advance?

And what if its arrival is delayed? Will you be able to find out exactly where the product is either by phone or via the Internet? And where on earth are you going to find the time to do all this product-chasing?

Once you do locate the drug, the question is: how are you going to transport it back home? Will you use a courier, a scheduled airline, road transportation, a shipping company or a combination of these possibilities? Your choice will determine the cost and speed at which your medicine arrives – for example, next day delivery can be up to 40 per cent more expensive. En route, can you be sure that the product will be stored securely and at the correct temperature? Did you know that if the customs documentation isn't filled out properly, your order can be held by customs officials for several days until you amend the paperwork. And even once you've jumped through all these hoops and your product arrives intact, you now need to check its authenticity, provenance and shelf life. Finally, you'll need to get a good-quality translation of the patient-information leaflet if the original is in a foreign language.

The main thing you need to consider is whether all the admin involved in finding and ordering these

orphan drugs – discontinued, supply-limited and unlicensed medicines – is really using your time wisely as a healthcare professional. Surely you've been trained to care directly for the individual patients, rather than to spend hours filling out boring forms. Not only that but I remember only too well – when I worked as a community pharmacist in London – the stress of trying to locate a medicine for next day delivery when it's needed for an urgent life-or-death situation.

One solution is to use a company that specialises in importing these products for you – just one phone call, fax or e-mail and it's done. The drug is located, transported and delivered directly to your hospital or wholesaler on the exact day you specify. Of course, being the Managing Director, I recommend Durbin PLC, but I think using any good company is easier, quicker, safer and more cost-effective than doing it all yourself.

● *Leslie Morgan (MRPharmS), Managing Director of Durbin PLC in the UK, is a Member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. Email: l.morgan@durbin.co.uk*

● *In the next issue, Leslie Morgan will look at the most effective ways to order large quantities of drugs for epidemic and crisis situations.*

“

One solution is to use a company that specialises in importing these products for you – just one phone call, fax or e-mail and it's done.