

Personal Statement from Durhane Wong-Rieger
on USA Drug Importation from Canada

I am an American citizen who has been a resident in Canada for more than 30 years. I am speaking as an individual offering my personal views.

By way of context, all of my and my husband's extended families live in the USA. I am as concerned for their well-being as for that of my family here. I have two children born with underlying conditions; my husband has chronic heart disease and Parkinson's Disease. I also have a daughter-in-law with Type 1 diabetes, so I am fully aware that having access to medicines is critically important.

I am speaking today to state as clearly as possible that the proposed plan to import drugs from Canada to the USA will have huge long-term negative consequences for both American and Canadian patients. I understand the underlying proposition. Some Americans can't afford their prescription drugs; some drugs are cheaper in Canada. At first glance, this seems to be a simple solution. Buy cheaper drugs from Canada and sell them to American patients at a lower price.

It is important to note, however, that this scheme would work for only some medicines and only for a short period of time. It is inevitable that drug manufacturers will restrict sales to Canada of those drugs that are being exported. At the same time, the Canadian government has banned exportation of ANY drugs that could lead to Canadian shortages. It will not take long for the pipeline from Canada to the USA to dry up, and very quickly if the more populous US states try to get into the game.

Moreover, one has to bear in mind that the wholesale price is only one component of the retail price. The net price to the patient would not necessarily reflect the same level of savings after the drug importer, the insurance company, and the dispensing pharmacy, among other intermediaries, all add their mark-ups and fees.

In the short term, given that the American population is ten times greater than the Canadian population, any significant wholesale exportation would put Canadian patients at serious risk for shortages of specific drugs. In the long-term the Canadian supply to the USA will be cut off, and Americans will be in the same situation as before, maybe worse, for example, if drug plans have adjusted to lower drug budgets.

Also, Canada does not have all of the drugs that are available in the USA, especially the newer, more advanced therapies that may work better, have fewer side effects, or be easier to use. Typically, it will take one to six years for new drugs to be introduced to Canada, in part because the introductory prices are lower. If American drug plans are going to rely on a Canadian supply, there is a risk that companies will shift the introduction of new medicines from the USA to Europe or Japan where they would have a more stable market.

As a patient advocate with family and friends in the USA, I want all patients to have access to the medicines that they need. American patients deserve a workable long-term solution, not a short-term political stunt that has no lasting benefit to patients on either side of the border and considerable risk for long-term harm. Thank you for your attention.

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