



CANADIAN
PHARMACISTS
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION DES
PHARMACIENS
DU CANADA

April 29, 2020

Dear Member,

Over the past 8 weeks, pharmacy practice has changed and adapted to the constantly evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Designated as essential services, pharmacies have remained open to patients and have even picked up additional responsibilities to provide care to Canadians when other services have been unavailable.

One of the biggest challenges that pharmacists have had to face is the difficult and unpredictable management of medication inventories. Specifically, in early to mid-March, pharmacies saw a 200% increase in demand from patients looking to refill their prescriptions early or requesting larger quantities. Additionally, we have been made aware of several disruptions affecting the supply chain, including at the manufacturing level in countries such as China and India that have restricted exports of certain ingredients, and challenges associated with transportation of products globally. In fact, the vast majority of drugs are currently under strict allocation, meaning that pharmacies are facing great difficulty in filling their orders on a weekly basis.

Recognizing this emerging threat, Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) recommended that governments and payers support a temporary 30-day limit on medications while demand stabilized and as we obtained further clarity on the long-term stability of supply chains. Most jurisdictions in Canada shared our concerns and implemented the new policy. Our only objective was to ensure that no Canadian would be turned away at the pharmacy counter due to lack of availability.

Despite our concerns with the availability of medications throughout the pandemic, we recognize the burden that this has placed on many Canadians who have been faced with additional costs. We do not believe that patients should be bearing these costs and have urged provincial governments and private insurers to work with us to address these costs.

Unfortunately, this policy has also placed added pressure on pharmacists who have had to balance the need to protect the integrity of the drug supply chain, while also facing tremendous criticism from patients and clients about additional fees associated with more frequent dispensing. We would like to take this opportunity to re-iterate that this policy is not one that pharmacists wanted, but one that we felt was necessary to ensure that every patient would continue to receive their drugs in the weeks to come. It has also required more work by pharmacy teams. Each prescription that is filled or refilled, regardless of quantity, requires the same level of care and procedures to ensure that the it is dispensed safely to every patient. This process includes verifying the ongoing need for the medication, verifying adherence to medication regimen by assessing time since last fill and ensuring no new drug interactions with other medications, and may also require communication with the prescriber to address concerns.



CANADIAN
PHARMACISTS
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION DES
PHARMACIENS
DU CANADA

Drug shortages are not new in Canada, but the uncertainty of this pandemic on the global economy, coupled with increased demand for essential products, has raised the risk of shortages considerably. Without government and payer support, pharmacies will not be able to continue to manage the precarious supply and demand of medications and protect Canadians against disruptions in Canada's supply chain.

In closing, we want to reassure you that CPhA is committed to the removal of this policy as soon as it is practicable and safe to do so. CPhA has taken a number of steps to implement a process to regularly review the 30-day supply recommendations, which includes working with all stakeholders within the supply chain and interested parties to assess the current vulnerabilities within the drug supply chain and determine when and how this policy could be relaxed in the future.

In the coming weeks, we will continue to work with Health Canada officials to share information on what pharmacies are seeing on the front lines as well as any updates regarding the 30-day supply.

Sincerely,

Glen Doucet
Chief Executive Officer