



News Release: Pharmacists Can Help Increase Access to Healthcare: Pharmacists' Association

December 3, 2019, St. John's. With more than 200 community pharmacies throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, many in small rural communities which currently lack medical clinics, pharmacists are well positioned to provide accessible patient care and with appropriate government support and funding, could increase access to healthcare for patients without family physicians.

Just one example of this is in the area of minor ailments. In 2015, new regulations under the *Pharmacy Act, 2012* allowed pharmacists in Newfoundland and Labrador to prescribe and treat a number of minor ailments requiring prescription medication, such as nausea, cold sores, hemorrhoids and eczema (see reference below).

“Studies have shown that these types of minor conditions comprise up to 40% of GP office visits,” said Janice Audeau, community pharmacist and President of the Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL). “And while it was positive when pharmacists were given the authority to prescribe and treat these conditions, more residents would avail of these services through their pharmacy if they did not have to pay out of pocket for it. Patients should be able to receive care from pharmacists without having to worry about the cost. Medical coverage for pharmacist care would certainly increase the number of patients availing of their local pharmacy instead of waiting to see a physician or going to the emergency room.”

Government support for changes to pharmacists' scope of practice, enabling pharmacists to practice to their full scope, would also increase the accessibility of health care delivery at a lower cost.

One example of this is Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) - a common condition that often results in the initiation of anti-bacterial therapy. UTI is the eighth most common reason for ambulatory clinic visits and the fifth most common reason for emergency department visits in Canada. UTI affects 12 to 15 percent of women annually and approximately 50 percent of women will experience a UTI by the time they turn 32 years of age. The ability for pharmacists to prescribe for UTI varies in Canada from province to province, with New Brunswick, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Alberta all allowing pharmacists to prescribe for this indication, to varying extents.

“Pharmacists are accessible primary care professionals who are well positioned to take on a larger role in the management of UTI,” said Ms. Audeau. “Residents in this province suffering from uncomplicated UTIs should be able to get prescriptions directly from a pharmacist instead of having to visit their doctor, walk in clinic or emergency room.”

Another area where pharmacists could provide more accessible and cost-effective care is hypertension management. A 2017 study (see reference below) showed that comprehensive long-term pharmacist care, including patient education and prescribing for Newfoundland and Labrador residents with hypertension, not only improves health outcomes but will save money for the province's health care system.

“The study supported the need for pharmacists to practice to full scope in the area of hypertension care,” said Ms. Audeau. “With the large number of people living with hypertension in this province, the burden on society is enormous both in health and economic terms. Pharmacists are highly accessible primary health care providers and ideally positioned to address the care gap in hypertension management. With the infrastructure for these services already in place, we need to ensure our pharmacists are able to make use of their full scope of skills, improving patient outcomes and, as a result, creating savings for the public purse.”

PANL believes collaboration is key to creating a more sustainable health system and looks forward to working with government, physicians and other healthcare providers to improve access to healthcare services, particularly in areas without readily available physician services.

PANL is the voice of pharmacists, with membership of over 700 pharmacists, 160 pharmacy students and 150 pharmacies. PANL advocates for pharmacists as health care team members integral to the effective and efficient delivery of health services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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Additional resources:

Hypertension Report and News Release

<https://panl.net/news/news-release-pharmacist-care-patients-hypertension-save-nl-health-care-system-335-million/>

<https://panl.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017.04.25-NL-Report-hypertension.pdf>

Minor Ailments News Release

<https://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2015/health/0922n02.aspx>