

Pharmacy Board Update on Exemption for Prescribing and Providing Controlled Substances

Health Canada has recently provided an exemption for patients and for pharmacists prescribing and providing controlled substances during COVID-19.

The exemption enables pharmacists to:

- Prescribe controlled substances for **continued** therapy
- Transfer prescriptions for controlled substances to other pharmacists
- Permit pharmacy employees to deliver prescriptions for controlled substances to patient's homes or other locations where they may be (i.e. self-isolating)

A pharmacist CANNOT:

- Initiate treatment with a controlled substance
- Accept verbal orders for medications subject to the Tamper Resistant Drug Pad Program

Health Canada Exemption Highlights for Prescribers:

- For the duration of this exemption, pharmacists may prescribe controlled substances for continuation of treatment in circumstances where the patient's primary care provider is unable to provide a prescription.
- Pharmacists must have the general NLPB authorization to prescribe in order to continue prescriptions for controlled substances.
- Pharmacists are NOT able to accept verbal orders from prescribers for medications subject to the TRPP program as this requires changes to various pieces of provincial legislation.
- For methadone and buprenorphine-naloxone that is prescribed for opioid use disorder. Under this exemption, pharmacists may be able to prescribe interim supplies of methadone or buprenorphine-naloxone. In NL, the following restrictions apply:
 - This prescribing authority is only available to pharmacists who are authorized by NLPB to prescribe AND authorized by NLPB to participate in OAMT services
 - Such pharmacists may only prescribe these OAMT medications in instances where the usual OAMT prescriber is unable to provide a written or faxed prescription on a TRPP form
 - The duration of the prescription should be for the minimum necessary under the circumstances, and cannot exceed 14 days per instance
 - For patients in which stability is a concern, pharmacists should only continue the original prescription one day at a time, reassessing the risks versus overall benefits to the patient each day, until they can reach the primary OAMT prescriber

Recommended Best Practices from Pharmacy Board NL

- Physician's should ensure pharmacies have their emergency contact information so that pharmacists can consult with them regarding care arrangements for individuals requiring OAMT during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Whenever possible, prescriptions should come from the OAMT prescriber. Pharmacists may be able to **continue** OAMT prescriptions in situations where the primary prescriber is not able to provide a prescription (for example, prescriber illness) -- however, this should not be considered the primary route for patients to receive renewal of their medication order. Pharmacists may not feel comfortable doing this in some situations and this could lead to cost implications for patients.

PBNL Suggested Resources:

[Health Canada Exemption 56 \(1\) FAQ](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Pharmacy Professionals](#)

[GOVNL - COVID-19 – SUPPORTING PEOPLE REQUIRING OPIOID DEPENDENCE TREATMENT \(ODT\)](#)