
A Message from the BC Pharmacy Association: Timely prescription renewals in residential care facilities and homes

The British Columbia Pharmacy Association (BCPhA) is writing to inform you about a standardized prescription renewal protocol for patients in residential care facilities and homes.

For years pharmacists have dispensed medications to patients in residential care facilities, who are on established regimens, when the prescription had expired. This was based on their experience that the responsible physician would ultimately renew the prescription and complete the necessary documentation. In certain cases pharmacists would use emergency prescription refill provisions to bridge the gap between the prescription expiry and renewal — the only appropriate action to be taken.

For some pharmacists, this practice was undertaken out of a desire to ensure continuity of care of patients on established medication regimes. However the practice did not meet PharmaCare contractual obligations and College of Pharmacists of BC ethical and legal obligations in the name of good patient care.

Securing timely renewals for prescriptions for residential care patients is a wide spread problem for pharmacists across the province. In the past, PharmaCare auditors had accommodated the practice of pharmacists dispensing medications to these patients in the absence of a prescription renewal. This was based on the expectation that the renewal would ultimately be received but auditors were under no obligation to do so. They have since ceased making these accommodations.

The change has meant that pharmacies have been subject to significant audit penalties for not receiving the appropriate, timely renewal of prescriptions from physicians and/or for not doing the appropriate documentation to support emergency refills.

To address this problem the BCPhA engaged in discussions with the Ministry of Health and agreement was reached that a standard renewal notification process for physicians was needed. There was also agreement that pharmacists needed to be able to advise physicians in ample time for them to review and renew patient medications in these facilities. The suggested protocol agreed to is as follows:

- Pharmacists should not continue to dispense medications beyond the expiry date of a prescription to any patient. This is not appropriate or legal. Regardless of the motivation a pharmacist has for doing this, it is not acceptable.
- Pharmacists will provide prescribers with patients in residential care facilities and homes with **30 days notice** that a patient's prescription is set to expire.
- In the event renewal authorization is not received by the date a prescription expires, the pharmacist may use the emergency prescription refill provisions and complete all needed documentation to support this action. **A 14-day supply of the medications may be dispensed.**

British Columbia Pharmacy Association

Suite 1530 - 1200 West 73rd Avenue

Vancouver, BC V6P 6G5

Tel: 604 261-2092 Fax: 604 261-2097



British Columbia
Pharmacy Association

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- If a renewal is not received at the end of the 14-day emergency refill period dispensing to the patient can stop. There is no legal basis to continue to dispense medications if a current prescription has expired. And,

info@bcpharmacy.ca www.bcpharmacy.ca

PharmaCare may not reimburse for any medications or dispensing fees beyond this point until a valid prescription is in place.

Input on this protocol was sought from physician organizations and the College of Pharmacists of BC. The protocol has also been shared with most long-term care facilities across the province (as identified on the websites of all the health authorities and the Community Care Licensing Branch), the BC Care Providers Association and the Ministry of Health. The doctors of bc will also be providing this information to their members.

We have recommended to our members that they employ this standardized approach from October 1, 2014, onwards.

All members of the health care team must do their part to provide patients in residential care facilities and homes with the highest quality of care possible, despite the challenges this presents. For pharmacists, that means taking the appropriate level of responsibility within their scope of practice and meeting documentation and legal requirements. For physician's it's a matter of ensuring that they make timely renewals of medications for their patients in residential care facilities and homes a priority. We believe this protocol will help to advance the goals of better patient care and ensuring each health care professional fulfils their patient responsibilities.

The British Columbia Pharmacy Association (BCPhA) is a not-for-profit association that is recognized for representing the interests of pharmacies and pharmacists throughout the province. The BCPhA represents more than 3,000 pharmacists and more than 850 pharmacies in BC. For further information please visit: <http://www.bcpharmacy.ca/>

Residential Care Facilities and Homes Managing Prescription Renewals

