
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2008HSERV0120-001939
Jan. 1, 2009

Ministry of Health Services

MOST ROUTINE PRESCRIPTIONS NOW EASIER TO RENEW

VICTORIA – Starting today, patients who run out of routine medications may ask their pharmacist to renew their prescription without always needing a doctor’s appointment first, said Health Services Minister George Abbott.

“We have acted on our throne speech commitment to permit pharmacists to authorize routine prescription renewals, making it easier for patients with chronic illnesses to manage their conditions,” said Abbott. “This change is inspired by what British Columbians told us during the Conversation on Health – that people wanted improved access to health services and greater choice about where they receive those services.”

As enabled by the Health Professions (Regulatory Reform) Amendment Act, 2008, pharmacists are now permitted to renew most routine medications for up to six months without requiring the patient to first present a new doctor’s prescription. For example, patients with long-term (chronic), stable conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes, who have been on the same medication for at least six months and are coming to the end of their supply of medication, may have their pharmacist renew the prescription.

Patients may also ask their pharmacists to adapt some prescriptions. Under the new rules, pharmacists will be able to change the prescribed dosage or substitute drugs, where it is appropriate, for example, to minimize side effects. In all instances of renewal and modification, pharmacists will follow strict guidelines prepared by the College of Pharmacists with input from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, the BC Pharmacists Association, and the BC Medical Association.

“Patients across B.C. now have more convenient access to quality health care. Pharmacists are pleased to be expanding clinical services by offering renewing and adapting of prescriptions,” said Marnie Mitchell, CEO of the B.C. Pharmacy Association. “By speaking with their community pharmacist -- the medication expert -- patients can learn how these services and many others can improve their health and overall lifestyle.”

“We are confident that pharmacists have the skills, knowledge and abilities to safely and effectively adapt prescriptions in the best interest of their patients, given the guidelines that have been put into place,” said Marshall Moleschi, Registrar College of Pharmacists of B.C.

“While the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC has agreed to this expansion in the pharmacists’ scope of practice, patients with chronic diseases should continue to follow-up with their physicians, as advised, to ensure that their condition remains stable,” says Dr. Doug Blackman, senior deputy registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC.

Patients who want a renewal or adaptation should talk to their pharmacist, who will consider each situation individually to determine if they have sufficient information about the patient and their health status to make a change in the patient's best interest. Patients will still need to see their doctors at least once a year to ensure their condition is stable and medication records and therapies are up to date.

Pharmacists are not obligated to renew or adapt a prescription, and in some cases, may decline a patient request. Pharmacists will not be able to change or renew prescriptions for narcotics or controlled substances. Likewise, in any case where the doctor has written "do not renew/adapt" on the original prescription, pharmacists will not be able to renew or modify the prescription. Only existing, valid prescriptions can be renewed or adapted. As well, all renewals and adaptations will be reported to the original prescriber as soon as possible, preferably with 24 hours.

Patients will be charged the usual dispensing fee for their medication, but will not be charged any other fees by the pharmacy for renewals or adaptations.

More information on renewal and adaptations of prescriptions by pharmacists can be found at the BC College of Pharmacists web site at www.bcpharmacists.org. Look for the brochure, "Understanding Your Pharmacist's Role in Renewing or Adapting Your Prescription", at http://www.bcpharmacists.org/library/A-About_Us/A-8_Key_Initiatives/PPP58_Brochure.pdf. Copies may be picked up at local pharmacies.

Media Sean Beardow
contact: Senior Public Affairs Officer
 Ministry of Health Services
 250 952-1887 (media line)
 250 213-1667 (cell)

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.