

College of Pharmacists of British Columbia



Guidelines for Dispensing Small Doses of Narcotics from the Emergency Department

An article in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of B.C.'s newsletter supported dispensing small doses of narcotics from the emergency department. The article summarized the College of Physicians and Surgeons of B.C.'s position as: "Patients should be provided with adequate analgesia at all times, and it is perfectly appropriate for physicians to prescribe narcotics to be dispensed in small quantities from the emergency room stock as a stop-gap measure. Equally, the emergency room physician can issue a triplicate prescription to a patient to take care of short-term opioid needs during normal business hours."

The Hospital Pharmacy Committee reviewed the issues surrounding the provision of "take-home" narcotic medications to outpatients who are discharged from the hospital emergency department. The committee recommends that when a patient is suffering acute pain and requires narcotic medication, it is reasonable to issue a small quantity of medication to take home from the hospital emergency department until the patient is able to obtain the required medication from a community pharmacy. Good pharmacy practice suggests that this is a patient care issue where the comfort and convenience of the patient is paramount, and the pharmacist should use professional judgment to do what is in the best interests of the patient.

ISSUING NARCOTIC TAKE-HOME MEDICATIONS FOR THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

The PHYSICIAN is responsible for:

- Assessing the need for narcotic analgesia for patients in acute pain.
- Prescribing appropriate narcotic medication.
- Ensuring that the medication issued under his/her name is appropriately labelled and placed in a child-resistant container.
- At the time of issuing the medication, co-signing the narcotic log book maintained in the emergency department, documenting the name of the patient receiving the drug.
- Providing the patient with a Controlled Prescription Program duplicate form to take to a community pharmacy for additional medication requirements.

When a small quantity of drug on the Controlled Prescription Program is given to a patient for out-of-hospital use from the emergency department, there is no requirement under the Controlled Prescription Program for a prescription on the Controlled Prescription Program duplicate form to be generated within the hospital under these circumstances.

The PHARMACY is responsible for:

- Ensuring selected narcotic medications and specified quantities have Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee approval.
- Ensuring that the medications are pre-packaged in child-resistant containers and labelled in accordance with the *Pharmacy Operations and Drug Scheduling Act* and applying Pharmacy auxiliary labels when appropriate.
- Monitoring and verifying the medication administration records against the physician's orders.

NURSING is responsible for:

- Complying with federal regulations for receiving and issuing narcotics and controlled substances.
- Maintaining records of all narcotics received and issued from the emergency department inventory.
- Verifying the actual balance of drugs on hand at least daily (using two nurses).