

Diversion of opioids and other controlled medications in hospitals

Opioid-related deaths have been on the rise in Canada in recent years, resulting in leaders to call on action to address this crisis.

The *Joint Statement of Action to Address the Opioid Crisis* outlines the many initiatives underway including improving prescribing through new guidelines, ensuring availability of antidotes to treat overdoses and supporting access to resources for practitioners and those affected by opioid use disorder.

Recognizing that there has been minimal study of the safeguards surrounding the large supplies of opioids and controlled drugs in hospitals, the HumanEra research team based at North York General Hospital, along with the Institute of Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP) recently conducted a scoping review of the literature and an extraction of diversion data from Canadian database repositories. The findings thus far, together with direct observations of hospital practices around the medication use and peripheral processes, aim to identify specific vulnerabilities that may exist within the hospital environment and inform future interventions that may mitigate the identified risks. Publication of these findings is expected in 2018-2019.

The Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists will make use of HumanEra's research as they develop guidelines for preventing, identifying, and responding to opioid diversion in hospitals and other healthcare facilities. The guideline will update and build on previous guidance documents from Health Canada and will include input from many collaborators. To date, partners include Health Canada, HealthCareCAN, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society, the Paramedic Association of Canada, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, ISMP Canada, and several health professional regulatory bodies. Publication of the guidelines is expected at the end of 2018. **H**

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Members of BC Cancer's Pharmacy Team in Vancouver.

Optimizing drug therapy for patients with cancer

Did you know that one in two Canadians are diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives and that one in four Canadians die from cancer? So unfortunately, either we or someone we know and care about will be faced with the diagnosis of cancer. Medication therapy for cancer, although life-saving in some circumstances, can have significant side effects and drug interactions, to the extent that medication errors can lead to devastating outcomes for patients.

Pharmacists, through their medication expertise can identify and resolve drug therapy problems, thus improving the intended outcomes with drug therapy, while minimizing side effects and drug interactions. At BC Cancer in Vancouver, pharmacists identify and resolve more than 20,000 medication-related problems every year. They do this by tapping into their in depth clinical knowledge about drug therapy, while asking such questions as:

- Are the right types of medications being used for the diseases that the patient is experiencing or may be at risk for?
- Are medications prescribed at the right doses, routes, frequencies, and durations?
- Are there any potential or actual drug interactions between the prescribed cancer medications

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and other medications and/or natural health products the patient is taking?

- Can the patient's medication therapy be simplified by discontinuing the medications that are no longer needed?
- Is there anything the patient could do to minimize the risk of experiencing medication-related side effects or complications?
- When should the patient contact the healthcare team to share potential concerns about cancer treatment?
- Are there certain tools and resources to help patients learn more about their cancer and its treatment, and assist them with complying with their prescribed medication therapy?

Without question, there are numerous health benefits to patients having their medications reviewed by a pharmacist in the cancer setting and otherwise. Wouldn't it be great if every patient in the healthcare system could have access to a pharmacist for the purpose of a comprehensive medication review? This would have huge cost-saving impli-

cations, in addition to known health benefits.

In addition to clinical interventions, pharmacists at BC Cancer are integral members of the healthcare team, who contribute to the development of cancer treatment protocols, pre-printed order forms, patient information handouts, drug information requests, research initiatives, as well as many other patient-focused activities. An area of research that has created quite a lot of interest at BC Cancer is its Personalized Oncogenomics Program (POG), which is a collaborative clinical research initiative that evaluates the impact of genomic sequencing on treatment planning for BC patients with advanced cancers. By understanding the genomic changes that contribute to cancer and its behaviour, cancer treatment can be more targeted to potentially achieve better results for patients. Through innovative research and multidisciplinary expertise and teamwork, it is hoped that patients with cancer may achieve improved health outcomes and prolonged survival from their treatments. **H**

This article was submitted by Shirin Abadi, BC Cancer.