

Thursday, August 11, 2011

Mrs. Madeleine Dube,  
Minister of Health,  
N.B. Government,  
Fredericton,  
New Brunswick.

Dear Mrs. Dube:

I have been a practicing community pharmacist in New Brunswick for over 39 years and have had the pleasure of meeting you at the recent MLA Breakfast held in Fredericton.

I wish to convey my thoughts on the Department's request for input based on the article "Fair Drug Prices for New Brunswickers".

While I realize that the provincial debt is an enormous burden, which needs to be addressed, the viability of community pharmacy is also an important issue for the residents of the province so that they can continue to receive the excellent pharmacy-related services to which they have become accustomed.

I will endeavour to present my argument in bullet form for easier reading.

- Pharmacists are the MOST TRUSTED professionals (January 2011 Ipsos-Reid poll).
- Pharmacists are also the most accessible health care professionals. For many years, we have offered valuable counseling services to our patients without reimbursement. These services have undoubtedly played a significant role in keeping health care costs from escalating even more than they are today by reducing unnecessary visits to physicians and to hospitals.
- Pharmacists need to be treated fairly with respect to drug prices, fees for services, incentives for new services such as pharmacist prescribing, adapting prescriptions, N.B. Pharmacheck and Immunization.
- The Prescription Drug Program has increased fees to pharmacists twice in the last ten years. Can that be considered fair? I think not. It has failed to meet inflationary and operational costs, which other provinces have enjoyed. The mark-up also needs to be re-instated in the reimbursement model.
- Trade allowances from generic companies have served to subsidize many of the unpaid services we have provided over time as well as the inadequate fees paid to us. Any reductions in this area need to be offset with fair and appropriate compensation.

- Our pharmacy makes significant contributions to local charities annually.
- Our pharmacy also directly supports nursing home services in our community partly through educational allowances.

So, what can our Government do to reduce the increased costs of the Prescription Drug Program?

1. First and foremost, the focus on generic drugs should be accompanied by a similar focus on BRAND NAME drugs sold by the multinational manufacturers. Enter into discussions with them with the objective of striking an agreement to reduce the cost of their products. These products contribute heavily to the \$180 million spent in 2010 by the Government in providing drugs to its clientele.
2. The article "Fair Drug Prices for New Brunswickers" states that 'People are Taking More Drugs'. One important cost-saving measure would be the implementation of a 30-day trial prescription program for those drugs prescribed for chronic conditions. This program alone would result in a significant reduction in wastage, thereby saving valuable dollars. This suggestion has been offered to Government on many different occasions but has never been embraced.
3. The article also notes that 'Prescription Drug Costs are Increasing'. Non-compliance with prescriptions is another problem, which contributes to the increased costs to the drug program. We have always done our due diligence in this regard, but more funding needs to be directed for greater education and counseling of the province's residents. There is no pill for every ill.
4. Investigate a faster approval process for new generic drugs.
5. Provide funding to support Therapeutic Substitution so that the less expensive generic equivalent can be dispensed.
6. Provide pharmacists with greater responsibility in the area of Immunization so that the residents can be served in a timely manner. We have two pharmacists on staff, who have been trained in this field.
7. Make amendments to the Regional Health Authority Act and hospital committees that would allow pharmacists to order lab tests and receive results electronically so that the system becomes more efficient and cost-effective.

Respectfully submitted,

Ivan Ho, Pharmacist,  
Rothesay/Quispamsis, N. B.