

Sunday, August-14-11

To Whom it may concern,

I have worked as a community pharmacist in both Ontario and New Brunswick. I have found that the NB government is more aware and appreciative of the role pharmacy plays in the healthcare of my fellow New Brunswickers. As a taxpayer in my home province, I fully understand and support measures to control all levels of government spending, inclusive of healthcare and education. We certainly are a “have-not” province whose financial health is on the decline. To that end, and in regards to healthcare spending on prescription medications, there are numerous tools available to reign in and control healthcare spending. Some of the methods developed by the NB Pharmacists’ Association and to which I support are:

1. 30 Day Trial Prescription
2. Faster process for approval of generic drugs
3. Funding to support Therapeutic Substitution (e.g. generic atorvastatin vs. Crestor brand)
4. Give pharmacists greater responsibility. We have a proven track record from pharmacists’ prescribing to pharmacists’ immunizations.

As a pharmacist, it makes me proud to be able to reach out and make a difference in the lives of my family, friends, and neighbours. Pharmacists were once again named the most trusted professionals in Canada (January 2011, IPSOS-REID survey). There is a reason for that. We are there for you when others are not. Healthcare is vastly underfunded in this country. For example, there is a physician shortage. Physicians are under a lot of stress from the system. Patients are frustrated. Pharmacists remain the most accessible of all healthcare providers. It is free to see a pharmacist! You pay to go to the dentist, physiotherapist, lawyer, mechanic, etc...Pharmacy remains the only profession where you are able to access the skills and knowledge of that profession at no cost to you.

The current model of reimbursement to community pharmacies is inadequate. For approximately the past century, pharmacy has been sustained via rebates from pharmaceutical manufactures. The province is proposing either elimination or major reductions in those rebates (similar to other provinces). Yes, some of this money does fall to the bottom line profitability of the pharmacy business. However, a large portion of this money goes to covering the shortfall in the cost to filling a prescription. According to a 2007 CACDS publication, the actual cost of filling a prescription was estimated to be \$13.60 per prescription. Presently, the province of New Brunswick reimburses pharmacies \$9.40 per prescription, a net deficit of - \$4.20 per prescription (based on 2007 figures). For years, rebates have covered this shortfall. Soon, this will no longer be the case. What does this mean for the general public? Perhaps simply less pharmacy options and longer wait times in metropolitan areas. It might mean no pharmacy at all for smaller communities like Petitcodiac, Salisbury, Doaktown, Rogersville, Neguac, Petit-Rocher, Port Elgin, and the list goes on.

There are several blockbuster name brand prescription medications that have just recently or will in the near future, come off patent (i.e. generic medication available at substantial financial savings). Some of these drugs are Lipitor, Diovan, Atacand, Plavix, Crestor, etc... which alone will result in a reduction in

the average prescription value (\$) and represents further cost-savings for the government. I hope that this government will work with pharmacists in developing a fair and responsible model for reimbursement. At present, pharmacists are not reimbursed for any cognitive services such as medication reviews (a potential cost-saver in of itself) and pharmacists prescribing (saving on after hour clinic and emergency visits).

Lastly, the third party insurance companies are certainly pro drug reform. The reform should not only save the province money, it will also result in major financial savings for insurance companies. Do you actually expect your premiums to be reduced? Your actual co-pay per prescription decreased? Do you honestly believe this will happen, that any potential cost-savings will be passed on to fellow New Brunswickers? I suspect not, the anticipation being that those savings will improve the bottom line profitability of insurance companies at the expense of community pharmacy.

New Brunswickers rely on their pharmacist daily to help them achieve optimal health outcomes. Is this worth the price of a coffee and donut at Tim Horton's to you? If you value "your pharmacist" speak up and be heard. Contact your local MLA today and have your say before it is too late.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Walsh, R.Ph