



Opioid Agonist Therapy during COVID-19 Outbreak

SASKATOON, March 19, 2020 – This press release provides information about the College’s activities related to Opioid Agonist Therapy.

The College has established specific expectations for physicians who prescribe Opioid Agonist Therapy. Due to the current pandemic, the College needs to balance the needs of and risks to the vulnerable patients who receive Opioid Agonist Therapy. Those risks include the fact that many patients who receive Opioid Agonist Therapy are unstable and may have chronic illnesses placing them at higher risk if exposed to Covid-19. That must be balanced against the risk associated with possible misuse of Opioid Agonist therapy, particularly methadone, which can include overdose and death.

On March 17, 2020 there was a meeting of an expert advisory committee which provided recommendations to the College to suspend some aspects of the standard for prescribing Opioid Agonist Therapy.

Health Canada will provide a temporary exemption to allow pharmacists to extend prescriptions for Opioid Agonist Therapy if prescriptions cannot be provided by the patient’s usual provider. That ability is subject to restrictions and conditions which have been established by the College of Pharmacy Professionals.

The Registrar has the power under College bylaws to declare an emergency, and to suspend the effect of some of the standards related to prescribing opioid agonist therapy. The Registrar has made such a declaration.

The declaration relies upon the professional judgment of Opioid Agonist Therapy prescriber and requires them to document deviations from the standards. The suspension of parts of the standard has the effect of allowing carries to be provided in some circumstances in which carries would not otherwise be available, primarily when a patient has a confirmed or suspected case of Covid-19, or has been exposed to Covid-19 and requires self-isolation or quarantine. Among the safeguards is that a lockbox must be provided and empty carry bottles must be returned to the pharmacy for proper disposal, and information about Take Home Naloxone Kits and appropriate training must be emphasized.

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