

ONTARIO MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE

Filling Prescriptions To Get Easier

McGuinty Government Supports Innovative Models For Drug Dispensing
TORONTO, May 6 /CNW/ - NEWS

Ontario is proposing to make it more convenient for patients to get their drug prescriptions filled by allowing remote dispensing across the province.

Legislation to be introduced in the coming days would, if passed, amend the Drug and Pharmacies Regulations Act (DPRA) and the Ontario Drug Benefit Act (ODBA) to allow prescriptions to be filled without the pharmacist being physically present. This remote dispensing could be done by:

- Patients using a dispensing machine to fill a prescription while speaking to the pharmacist through built-in video conferencing
- Pharmacy technicians dispensing drugs under the supervision of a pharmacist who is connected by a video link-up
- Mail order where medications for chronic conditions are dispensed and delivered regularly to patients' homes.

Some of the benefits associated with remote dispensing would include:

- Increasing access to medication and improving convenience for patients (especially those in remote areas of the province)
- Supporting new business development and made-in-Ontario technologies
- Potentially reducing the cost of drug distribution

To help ensure patient safety, the Ontario College of Pharmacists would be responsible for accrediting, monitoring and enforcing the regulatory requirements for these new types of drug dispensing systems.

QUOTES

"Remote drug dispensing is beginning to emerge as a viable alternative to the traditional pharmacy. We want to make it easier for patients to get the medications they need, and we want to do it in a way that ensures patient safety and is cost effective."

- David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

QUICK FACTS

- As a pilot project that began in June 2008, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre has had two dispensing machines.
- Made-in-Ontario technology is being used in the pilot
- Narcotics will not be available through remote dispensing capabilities

LEARN MORE

Find out more about Ontario Public Drug Programs
(http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/program/drugs/drugs_ep.html).

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BACKGROUNDER

LEGISLATION SUPPORTING REMOTE DRUG DISPENSING

CURRENT STATUS

Under the Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act (DPRA), pharmacies must be accredited by the Ontario College of Pharmacists and are required to meet certain standards of operation. One such requirement is that dispensing medication be done under the direct supervision of a pharmacist who is physically present in the pharmacy.

The proposed DPRA amendments would enable the use of remote dispensing technology while at the same time ensuring accountability and the protection of the public.

The new dispensing technology is currently being tested at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto.

Here is how a medication dispensing machine works:

- the machine makes a scan of the prescription, which is transmitted to the pharmacist at a separate site who receives and processes the prescription
- the pharmacist will approve the order and provide relevant information including possible side effects to the patient via the two-way video teleconference capability
- provided the medication is stocked in the machine, which can hold up to 340 medications, the appropriate drug is identified through radio frequency identification tags on the product, and
- the prescription is once again verified by the remote pharmacist, and then dispensed to the patient.

PATIENT SAFETY

The proposed legislation, if passed, would require that a pharmacist be available at the time that the prescription is submitted by the patient to review and approve the prescription, monitor the dispensing, and counsel the patient with regard to the drug product. In other words, the pharmacist would perform the same pharmacy services he or she currently provides but through a virtual medium with the use of technology.

The Ontario College of Pharmacists would be responsible for accrediting, monitoring and enforcing the regulatory requirements for these new types of drug dispensing. The safe practice requirements for a remote dispensing location would be similar to the requirements applicable to a traditional brick and mortar pharmacy. The College is responsible for bringing forward regulations under the DPRA. This may include regulating the operation and maintenance to operate such locations, or the type of drug products that may be dispensed by way of remote dispensing - for example, prohibiting narcotics or other controlled substances to be dispensed remotely.

PATIENT ACCESS

Introducing new technology into pharmacy operations may help to:

- make medications readily available where they are most often prescribed; and therefore, may enhance patient access to medications
- provide convenience for people in remote (rural/northern) communities

SUPPORTING INNOVATION

In keeping with its commitment to attract new business development within the province and to facilitate technological innovation within health care, remote dispensing would bring innovation to Ontario.

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