To: Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians  

From: Susan Wedlake, Registrar  

Date: February 10, 2015  

Re: Recent media attention on pharmacy practice  

Recent media attention resulting from CBC investigative reports on pharmacy practice has created concern within the pharmacy community. The reports highlighted medication errors and incidents where Canadian pharmacists, including in Halifax, did not follow the expected standards of practice, including those associated with the sale of Schedule II drugs.

In general, pharmacists across Canada were characterized poorly. However the segment did highlight the fact that Nova Scotia pharmacists are the only pharmacists in the country who participate in a continuous quality improvement program (SafetyNET Rx) that reports medication incidents, including errors and near misses, to a national database. The media conveyed in their coverage that the public is best served when pharmacists acknowledge and discuss errors and near misses in an open, honest manner, and report them to a national database so that they can be analyzed to understand their root cause. They highlighted that by recording all incidents, including near-misses, issues and trends can be identified and steps can be taken to reduce the likelihood of their future occurrence.

SafetyNET Rx was created by the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists (NSCP) and researchers from St. Francis Xavier and Dalhousie Universities with the help of Nova Scotia pharmacists. Thirteen Nova Scotia pharmacies stepped up to the plate and helped to design a proactive continuous quality improvement process that could be used in a busy pharmacy and would contribute to patient safety. The fact that 97% of the total medication incidents reported to the national database over the past three years were from Nova Scotia pharmacies, and that 85% of those incidents were intercepted by the pharmacist and never reached the patient, are a testament to the hard work of Nova Scotia pharmacists and to their commitment to the safety of the public they serve. The CBC Marketplace segment highlighted the fact that Nova Scotia pharmacists are dedicated to taking the necessary steps to learn from errors and near misses in order to continually improve pharmacy practice.

The CBC Marketplace reports and subsequent comments also highlighted concerns expressed by pharmacists related to workload and how it can negatively affect patient care. These are also of concern to the NSCP. As you know, the NSCP has taken steps to better understand these issues and explore possible solutions. Working with the same research team that helped us create SafetyNET Rx, the NSCP
reached out to you with a survey that included questions related to workload and quotas and how, in your opinion, they affect your ability to practise safely and effectively. We received a high response rate to these important questions and your input will inform the steps that the NSCP will take to help address this issue.

In consideration of these workload concerns and how they can negatively impact patient care, we continue to encourage you to take the time, when submitting your pharmacy’s quality related events (QREs) to CPhIR, to identify and report the contributing factors (including staffing or workload issues). The learning potential of reported QREs is enhanced by the extent and quality of the supporting information submitted to the CPhIR program. There is evidence that employers pay attention to this quality information and will make the changes needed to improve the quality and safety of the pharmacy’s services.

With respect to the standards of practice expected of pharmacists, the NSCP will be hosting a series of zone meetings in the coming months to provide a forum for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to have an open dialogue to discuss and clarify the current standards of practice and how these standards can be achieved. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are encouraged to watch for further details and to plan to attend the meetings.

The NSCP would like to share with pharmacists that, in response to the recent media attention, members of the public have contacted us to advise of the excellent service they have received from their pharmacists, including preventing harmful drug interactions. These scenarios are not exceptional, but are examples of the many critical activities pharmacists undertake in the health care system every single day.

It is the opinion of the NSCP that, despite the recent media attention, Nova Scotia pharmacists should not forget that they lead the country in creating and maintaining a continuous quality improvement process designed to ensure that Nova Scotians receive the best possible care.

The NSCP is committed to providing a regulatory framework that serves the public and that also supports you in your day-to-day practice as you strive to provide your patients with safe and effective care. We will be bringing workload concerns to the attention of advocacy organizations and employers and doing what we can within our mandate to address them in a manner that ensures pharmacists are able to practise in an environment that is safe and supportive as you practise in accordance with the standards of practice.