Memorandum

From: Dr. Drew Bethune, Senior Medical Director, NSHA Cancer Care Program
Margaret Ann Morrison, Senior Director, NSHA Cancer Care Program

To: Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists
Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia

Date: October 25, 2019

Cc: Dr. Bruce Colwell, Medical Oncologist and Co-Chair Oncology Therapy Subcommittee,
Joanne Houlihan, Pharmacist and Co-Chair Oncology Therapy Subcommittee, NSHA
Cancer Care Program
Glenn Cox, Senior Director, NSHA Provincial Pharmacy Services

Re: Tamoxifen Drug Shortage

**********Please share with pharmacies throughout Nova Scotia**********

Summary:
On October 2, 2019, the Health Canada Tier Assignment Committee recognized Tamoxifen to be at a critical shortage level in Canada. Tamoxifen is manufactured in Canada by Apotex, Teva Canada and Astra Zeneca. All three manufacturers are reporting supply shortages and all provinces and territories in Canada are affected.

Health Canada recognizes the critical nature of this shortage and is actively working with all Canadian suppliers to see if the problem can be mitigated or if alternative sources can be imported for use in Canada.

Tamoxifen is used mainly for the treatment of breast cancer in the metastatic and adjuvant settings. The half-life of the drug is long and maintains some level of activity for a few weeks after being stopped. It may be reasonable to stop Tamoxifen for a short time in the hope that the shortage begins to abate and without expectation of adverse health outcomes.
Recommendations for pharmacies:
- To conserve available drug, we ask that you limit dispensing quantities to a 30 day supply until the shortage is resolved.

- If you are asked to fill an order and you have no supply, we ask that you call around within the province to see if you can find a pharmacy that does have supply.

- If you are unsuccessful in finding supply within Nova Scotia, we ask that you consider using your corporate structures or other contacts to access supplies that might be available in other provinces.

- If there is no available supply and no hope for resupply in the near future, please do not call or suggest patients call a medical oncologist. Patients who want or need an appointment with a medical oncologist will need a referral and should be advised to see their family doctor or nurse practitioner to discuss the best option for them. Patients who do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner should go to a walk-in clinic.

- Patients who have concerns may call NSHA’s toll-free line at 1-844-989-1502 for basic information and to leave their name and contact information for updates. Pharmacists and all health care providers may also call this line.

Other communication:
We have / are sharing similar information with:
- NSHA Cancer Care Program physicians and staff
- Primary Care Providers in Nova Scotia
We will also respond to inquiries from the media.

If patients ask you about the Tamoxifen shortage, please let them know:
- The benefits of Tamoxifen stay in a person’s system for a few weeks and the drug shortage may be resolved by then.
- The Tamoxifen shortage is a problem across the country and NSHA is working with our partners across Canada to find a solution.
- If they have questions, they should first speak with their family doctor or Nurse Practitioner.
- They may also call the toll-free number at 1-844-989-1502 for basic information and to leave their name and contact information for updates.

Thank you for considering our requests. We appreciate anything you can do to support our cancer care program and patients as we work through the Tamoxifen shortage. We are hopeful that current supply issues will be resolved soon. Our NSHA Oncology Therapy Subcommittee will continue to monitor the situation and we will keep you posted on any changes.