



Nova Scotia
College of
Pharmacists

Governing the practice of pharmacy in Nova Scotia in the interest of the health and well being of the public

Standard of Care During a Crisis

Introduction

Nova Scotia pharmacy practitioners are familiar with fulfilling their responsibilities as defined in the Standards of Practice. During a public health emergency, practitioners may be presented with a new ethical dilemma: a pandemic may overwhelm healthcare resources and introduce challenges in the delivery of care. Pharmacy practitioners may need to shift their standard of care framework from one that focuses on individual patients to one that focuses on what is best for the greatest number of individuals.

The NSCP has established [*A Pharmacy Professional's Duty During a Crisis: An Ethical Framework*](#) to assist pharmacy practitioners in their decision-making process in the event of a health emergency. Health emergencies are exceptional situations that do not relieve practitioners of their professional responsibilities. In fact, a health emergency will likely challenge practitioners to assume their roles with additional rigor.

General Practice

The NSCP will establish various practice provisions and advisories that support practitioners in meeting their professional responsibilities to patients during an emergency, and are made in consideration of competing public interests that have different weighting at such times. These provisions are made in accordance with the Pharmacy Act and regulations and are consistent with the principles of the NSCP's standards and policies.

In other situations, pharmacy practitioners will need to use their expert knowledge to navigate their patient's unique circumstances. While pharmacy practitioners will need to do this in accordance with the Pharmacy Act and regulations, the way in which they meet their professional responsibility in each unique circumstance may require variations from regular practice. At all times, a practitioner will need to be prepared to justify the rationale for their decisions if called upon to do so.

Allocation of Medication

During times of shortage, pharmacies are called on to fully appreciate and prioritize their key role within the health system. Guided by principles of public interest and stewardship, pharmacies and pharmacy practitioners use their access to scarce resources to benefit all patients. With a spirit of common purpose within and between health care organizations and professionals, we can help to prioritize the needs of those who are made most vulnerable by a shortage and safeguard the public's trust. In times of scarcity, and particularly for critically needed medications with few or no alternatives on the Canadian market, collaboration across the profession is essential.

During a crisis, balancing the needs of individuals versus the greater good may be difficult. Decisions regarding resource allocation, such as vaccine and anti-viral rationing, should be left to public health officials and may depend on the nature of the infectious pathogen. The NSCP advises its registrants to comply with directives from

Public Health authorities with regard to allocation of vaccines and antivirals and to maintain the principle of equity in situations requiring the rationing of medication for the treatment of other diseases.

Restrictive Measures

The *Nova Scotia Health Protection Act* upholds the authority to apprehend and isolate or quarantine through the Medical Officer of Health. Restrictions to individual liberty should be proportional to the risk of public harm, be necessary and relevant to protecting the public good, employ the least restrictive means necessary to achieve public health goals, and be applied without discrimination. The NSCP expects that practitioners will adhere to any orders of quarantine by the government.

Conclusion

This Standard of Care and the *A Pharmacy Professional's Duty During a Crisis: An Ethical Framework* are aimed at assisting pharmacists in thoughtful consideration of the ethical conflicts they can expect to face in the event of a health emergency such as a pandemic and to provide the substantive values that are critical in such a consideration.

Deciding on their role during a healthcare emergency requires reflection and planning by pharmacists and includes the consideration of how their families will be provided for when they are actively serving, how to minimize their own personal risk while serving, and how ethical obligations and values will impact their decisions. Fortunately for society, history has demonstrated that the majority of healthcare professionals will fulfill their obligations during a public health crisis.

November 2009

Updated April 2020