



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

Serving the public by regulating physicians and surgeons

Prescribing medications during the COVID-19 pandemic

In light of extreme measures being taken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, all registrants are being asked to make decisions about amending prescribing practices that keep patients as safe as possible, while accommodating the enhanced need for physical distancing, self-isolation, or quarantine.

First, this may have an impact on patients requiring prescriptions for drugs under the Controlled Prescription Program (CPP). Patients at particular risk are those on opioid medications for chronic pain or those receiving opioid agonist therapy (OAT). These medications require a duplicate prescription and generally require a face-to-face interaction.

The Ministry of Health, the College of Pharmacists of BC, and the regulatory colleges of all the prescribers of controlled drugs are working toward a solution. In these exceptional times, registrants must ensure their patients have an unbroken supply of these medications. If it is not possible to meet with a patient face-to-face, registrants must consider alternate means to get duplicate prescriptions to pharmacies.

Health Canada has provided temporary exemptions to parts of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)* and its Regulations to: permit pharmacists to extend prescriptions and transfer prescriptions; to permit pharmacists and pharmacy employees to deliver controlled medications; and to permit prescribers to issue verbal orders for controlled medications. Accordingly, the College of Pharmacists of BC has amended its bylaws relating to the *Pharmacy Operations and Drugs Scheduling Act (PODSA)* and the *Health Professions Act (HPA)*.

During the pandemic: It is now acceptable for registrants to fax prescriptions or give verbal prescriptions for controlled drugs to pharmacists over the phone, and then deliver a hard copy of the original duplicate form (by mail, courier or other means).

Note: It is essential the pharmacists receive the original duplicate form as soon as reasonably possible.

Registrants are expected to weigh carefully the risks and benefits to both patients and the public when prescribing by these means. The need for physical distancing and self-isolation and the risks of travel to medical appointments for physicians and patients, have to be placed into context with the overarching need to ensure continuous supply of these essential medications.

To further enable access to these controlled prescriptions, pharmacists are able to provide emergency supplies of controlled drugs (including OAT). Pharmacists are also able to deliver these medications when it is safe and in the best interest of the patient to do so, which includes practising physical distancing and screening for potential COVID-19 exposure. Information on the corresponding College of Pharmacists of BC bylaw changes can be found [here](#).

The BC Centre on Substance Use has developed updated clinical guidance for prescribers and pharmacists to improve access to OAT in the context of COVID-19. It can be found [here](#) under Bulletins. This will be updated regularly as new information and guidance becomes available.

During the pandemic, prescribing of non-controlled medications will also be affected. For information on prescribing in general via telemedicine and phone consultations, please check the [College website](#) frequently.

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