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Canadian Healthcare Association  
Association canadienne des soins de santé  
75 years of service / 75 années de service

## **Policy Positions Regarding Issues addressed by the National Pharmaceuticals Strategy**

### **OPTIMAL AND APPROPRIATE USE OF PHARMACEUTICALS THROUGH INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR**

(Approved by Board of Directors, June 2006)

In September 2004, Canada's First Ministers agreed to establish a ministerial task force to develop and implement a National Pharmaceuticals Strategy (NPS) and to report on their progress by June 30, 2006. The sixth action of the National Pharmaceuticals Strategy is to enhance action to influence the prescribing behaviour of health care professionals so that drugs are used only when needed and the right drug is used for the right problem. CHA defines optimal and appropriate use of pharmaceuticals through influencing behaviour as *achieving more appropriate use of pharmaceuticals through educating and influencing the decision-making and/ or prescribing practices of physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and the public.*

#### **Policy Positions**

- CHA supports the strategy of federal, provincial, and territorial governments to improve health outcomes and control health expenditures by promoting appropriate use of prescription drugs (Health Canada, 2004).
- CHA recognizes the imperative of influencing the prescribing and dispensing behavior of physicians, pharmacists, and other health providers, in order to encourage appropriate utilization of pharmaceuticals. This may be addressed through continuing education; collaborative, skills-based practice; using appropriate information management techniques; and other strategies.
- Federal, provincial, and territorial governments should fund research by the Canadian Institute for Health Information or other appropriate research organizations on factors affecting utilization; including, but not limited to; prescribing behaviors, industry practices, and academic detailing (physician education around pharmaceutical products that is done by academics rather than pharmaceutical representatives).

- Health system funders and managers should support efforts to produce and disseminate information about the appropriate use of pharmaceuticals to providers and to the public.
- The federal government should review and strengthen regulations regarding physician detailing and direct to consumer advertising.

## Background

- Optimal and appropriate utilization of pharmaceuticals may reduce drug expenditures, improve patient outcomes, and reduce adverse events.
- Influencing prescribing practices may be the most effective method of fostering optimal and appropriate utilization, particularly when based on practice changes that are evidence-based and have the support of health system managers and providers.
- There is a need to counter-act methods used by the pharmaceutical industry to influence prescribing practices, for example, physician detailing and direct to consumer advertising (DTCA) (Mintzes, 2006). Multiple and sustained strategies such as ‘academic detailing<sup>1</sup>’ and decision-support tools like the Canadian Pharmacists Association’s e-Therapeutics are needed for effective change in prescribing behaviours.
- The Canadian Optimal Medication Prescribing and Utilization Service (COMPUS), a program of the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, develops, and promotes best practices in drug prescribing and use.
- The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) recommends tying pharmaceutical policies to primary care reform, arguing that doing so can improve access, while containing costs and promoting appropriate utilization (2000). Furthermore, IRPP emphasizes the importance of ensuring that health providers, who prescribe and dispense pharmaceuticals, are sensitive to the costs and benefits of pharmaceutical therapies.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic detailing is a technique similar to the detailing used by pharmaceutical companies but, as used by health insurance plan providers, the objective is to promote appropriate and cost-effective prescribing rather than the promotion of specific products (Kennedy & Goyer, 2002).

- Clinical pharmacy services are key to the promotion of better prescribing.

## References

- Kennedy, W. & Goyer, R. Sharing the Learning: The Health Transition Fund: Synthesis Series Pharmaceutical Issues. Ottawa: Health Canada, 2002.
- Mintzes, B. Direct-to-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs in Canada: What are the Public Health Implications? Toronto: Health Council of Canada, January 2006.
- *Pharmaceuticals Management and Catastrophic Drug Coverage*, Health Canada, September 2004.
- *Recommendations to First Ministers*, IRPP Task Force on Health Policy, Institute for Research on Public Policy, September 2000.

The Canadian Healthcare Association is a leader in developing, and advocating for, health policy solutions that meet the needs of Canadians.

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