

# New policy clarifies doctors' obligations when dispensing drugs

Council has approved a policy that sets out expectations for physicians who dispense drugs. The policy was necessary in the wake of recent developments in dispensing practices.

**Policy does not apply to samples**

Aside from giving samples to patients, dispensing is not an act that many physicians currently do in their practices. The introduction of dispensing

kiosks into the Ontario health-care system, however, has the potential of involving many more physicians in dispensing activities.

“Given this development, Council believed that a policy that clarified obligations would be helpful to physicians. At the very least, we wanted to flag this as an area that was complicated. Physicians who dispense drugs need to be aware of all the legislative and regulatory requirements attached to this controlled act,” said Dr. Jack Mandel,

College President.

The new policy, just approved by Council in May, sets out the College's expectations for dispensing and articulates the standards which need to be met around procurement of drugs, storage, record keeping, packaging, labelling, and disposal of drugs. This policy makes it clear that, in all these areas, physicians must meet the same standards that a pharmacist must meet.

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The policy, which reflects the feedback from a consultation with stakeholders, also includes expectations related to payment issues and compliance with drug related legislation.

The policy was developed in collaboration with the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP). This collaborative policy development is consistent with one of the new college objects introduced by Bill 179: to develop in consultation and collaboration with other Colleges, standards relating to the performance of controlled acts common among health professions.

The drug kiosk system is new to Ontario and there are still many issues surrounding this dispensing practice that need to be addressed.

The College will closely monitor this evolving issue and report to the profession. Ultimately, however, accountability for drug dispensing through a kiosk will depend on the particular model of the kiosk.

In the model currently in use, the pharmacist makes the final decision (via video) as to whether the drug is released from the kiosk. In this scenario, the College is of the view that the pharmacist is accountable for dispensing, not the physician. The College, however, believes that other models of dispensing kiosks may be introduced where accountability for dispensing could lie with the physician. Physicians who do find themselves dispensing in these



circumstances must meet the obligations set out in the dispensing drugs policy.

This policy does not apply to the provision of samples. For guidance on providing samples, physicians should refer to the College's policy on Drug Samples available on the CPSO website, [www.cpso.on.ca](http://www.cpso.on.ca) under Policies. **MD**

## Block fees and uninsured services continued from page 26

intended to ensure that patients are fully informed of their payment options for uninsured services and that patients have access to health-care services, regardless of whether they pay a block fee."

The policy also acknowledges the growing use of third party companies to assist physicians in administering a block fee or payment for uninsured services. The policy is clear that any communication to patients should identify the fact that a third party was involved. "Third parties who are asked to administer block fees or payment for uninsured services are acting on the physician's behalf. Physicians

are responsible for ensuring these companies adhere to the same standards required of physicians," states the policy.

The policy has always required that physicians who offer a block fee must provide patients with a copy of the CPSO policy (or tell them how they can obtain a copy). The new policy comes with a one-page patient information sheet, which physicians can give to their patients, instead of the policy.

"We thought that having the main points of the policy in a short, patient-friendly format will help ensure patients understand the payment options available to them and

generally what is/is not acceptable when physicians charge for uninsured services. The patient info sheet also has a link to our website, should the patient want to view the policy in full," said Dr. Mandel.

All the existing requirements articulated in previous College policies on the subject are retained in the new policy. As in the earlier policy, the College states that if physicians charge patients for uninsured services, they must make a list of fees available to the patient. This list must be available regardless of whether the fee will be paid on an individual per service basis, or in the context of a block fee. **MD**