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Date: June 14, 2023

Purpose

We, the undersigned, are a group of frontline providers requesting the College of Pharmacists to support increased access for Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT) which includes Methadone, Slow Release Oral Morphine (SROM or “Kadian” as the trade name), Buprenorphine/Naloxone, and Sublocade by increasing the number of pharmacies in the province that carry these medications.

Background

In 2021, nearly 2900 opioid overdose deaths were captured in Public Health Ontario Data.[1] Most opioid deaths were in the 25-64 age demographic which is remarkably younger than many Ontarians who died of Covid-19 whose median age of death ranged between 74 and 85.[2] The Opioid Crisis has been particularly devastating in Rural and Indigenous communities which have significantly higher death rates than their urban counterparts.[3,4,5] The death rates increased exponentially from previous years due to the Public Health Measures that were taken to contain the COVID-19 Pandemic. Though Ontario's 2022 data has not been released yet, it is very likely to be similar to the previous year and we have no indication 2023 will be different.[6]

Methadone and Buprenorphine were added to the World Health Organization's list of essential medications in 2005 and all forms of OAT are life-saving medications that are crucial in countering the opioid epidemic, which has been further fuelled by fentanyl and fentanyl analogs.[7] Recent studies show that individuals who continue to use fentanyl while they are on methadone and buprenorphine in its various forms have lower rates of overdose and death.[8,9]

Analysis

Methadone Maintenance Therapy continues to be difficult to access – due to the lack of availability at local pharmacies, access to skilled prescribers, and transportation (especially for individuals residing in remote communities). Less than 40% of Ontario pharmacies carry methadone while the need for OAT exists across the province.[10]

The following three criteria to increase access to OAT in the province are analysed:

1) Increase the number of pharmacies that offer OAT. An inventory of at least two days of OAT available for patients (e.g. methadone of up to 250 mg po daily, Buprenorphine/Naloxone up to 32/8 mg SL daily, and Slow Release oral Morphine up to 1500 mg po daily, and Sublocade 100 mg and 300 mg) would be ideal.

Though many pharmacies located within lower demand for OAT areas may experience waste and some pharmacies may experience a marginal increase in operating cost and administrative costs may to obtain licensing (currently regulated by the College of Pharmacists, patients at any pharmacy will have increased access to OAT).

2) Dispensing of medication irrespective of a patient's health card status on an emergency basis.

Many patients with opioid use disorder are often geographically displaced from neighbouring provinces, have expired or lost Health Cards and ID, and in some cases, may not be eligible under provincial health plans. This may cause some increase in up front costs to pharmacies and new processes may need to be implemented and developed to support pharmacists in this work. Yet given the incredibly high death rate we are seeing in Ontario, as well as nationally, it is imperative to reduce these barriers to this very vulnerable and marginalised population.

3) Ensure cultural safety and competency, and use a trauma informed lens in caring for Indigenous patients who are disproportionately affected by the ongoing opioid emergency.

As mentioned above, indigenous people are disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis due the intergenerational trauma from the Residential School system in this country. Though there may be an increased cost to implement cultural safety training, it is important to bring this lens to frontline pharmacies to reduce the stigma and barriers this population in particular faces and their historically

Final Recommendation

Given the scale of the opioid crisis and the alarming death rate we are witnessing, it is imperative we reduce the barriers to evidence-based, life saving opioid therapy. If possible, we believe the above three recommendations will address the large barrier in OAT access for Ontarians with recommendation #1 being the highest priority.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned (see below past references)

References

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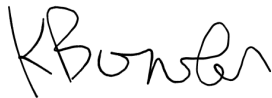
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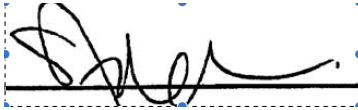
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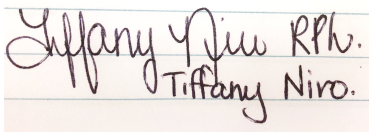
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Date Signed: 2023-05-23

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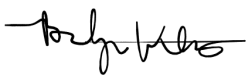
Full Name: Dr. Andrew Patterson
Email: andrewpa@gmail.com
City: Ottawa
Professional Designation: Physician
Individual Signature:



Organization Signature: CATC
Organization Endorsed by: CATC
Date Signed: 2023-05-24

=====

Full Name: Roselyn Wilson
Email: roselyn.wilson@medportal.ca
City: Hamilton
Professional Designation: MD FRCPC (Psychiatry)
Individual Signature:



Date Signed: 2023-05-25

=====

Full Name: Melanie Vandewiel
Email: vandewiel11@gmail.com
City: Windsor
Professional Designation: Nurse Practitioner
Organization Signature: Hotel Dieu Grace Healthcare: Withdrawal Management Services
Organization Endorsed by: Hotel Dieu Grace Healthcare: Withdrawal Management Services
Date Signed: 2023-05-25
=====

Full Name: Jennifer Burton
Email: jennifer26burton@gmail.com
City: Windsor
Professional Designation: Nurse Practitioner
Individual Signature:

Jennifer Burton NP

Organization Signature: Jennifer Burton NP PHC
Date Signed: 2023-05-25
=====

Full Name: Jennifer
Email: Hulme
City: Toronto
Professional Designation: MD, MPH
Individual Signature:



Date Signed: 2023-05-28
=====

Full Name: Hasan Sheikh
Email: hasanmsheikh@gmail.com
City: Toronto
Professional Designation: CCFP-EM
Date Signed: 2023-05-29
=====

Full Name: Joel Voth
Email: joel.voth@medportal.ca
City: Toronto
Professional Designation: MD, CCFP
Individual Signature:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1EK2PoOEbBhP7C8I-T-GcSqbarhMDEvoR>



Date Signed: 2023-05-31

=====

Full Name: Sam Moniz

Email: Ms.sandramoniz@gmail.com

City: Toronto

Professional Designation: Overdose Prevention Worker

Date Signed: 2023-06-03

=====

Full Name: Mattia David

Email: mattiaewdavid@gmail.com

City: toronto

Professional Designation: RN

Individual Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' followed by a large, sweeping loop that ends in a small hook.

Date Signed: 2023-06-09

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