



Community pharmacy owners support Ontario patients during COVID-19

March 15, 2020 (Toronto, ON) Pharmacy owners in Ontario who are represented at the Owners Advisory Council of the Ontario Pharmacists Association want to reassure Ontario patients that community pharmacies across the province are here to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ontario pharmacists are one of the most trusted and accessible healthcare providers. In Ontario, there are more than 4,600 community pharmacies, many of which are open extended hours, and in some cases 24 hours. As a result, Ontarians have traditionally turned to their pharmacist for advice on managing their health and their medications. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are particularly proud of the trust Ontarians have placed in them, and right now, during this significant healthcare crisis, it is imperative to leverage these strong professional relationships between patients and their pharmacists.

“We are in unprecedented times. We want our patients to know that we are here for them. We’re here to respond to all their health needs. But we all need to act responsibly. There have been recommendations that patients should obtain early or additional refills of their prescriptions ahead of schedule,” says Donnie Edwards, an independent pharmacist-owner from Ridgeway, ON and the co-chair of OPA’s Owners Advisory Council. “This isn’t necessary and may actually put additional stress on our drug supply system and contribute to a worsening of drug shortages that have predated COVID-19. Stockpiling of other products such as hand sanitizers and toilet paper have already led to shortages and stock-outs, and we simply cannot allow that to happen with prescription medications,” says Edwards.

“Pharmacy professionals are here to serve as stewards of Ontario’s medication supply. At this time, we are unaware of any increase in drug shortages specifically linked to COVID-19. The number we are seeing on drugshortages.ca is consistent with what we saw at the end of 2019. However, we are monitoring this,” says Deb Saltmarche, co-chair of OPA’s Owners Advisory Council and Senior Director, Professional Affairs at Shoppers Drug Mart.

Edwards and Saltmarche confirm that there are important clinical reasons why pharmacists can’t always extend a prescription. Whether lab work may be required, or follow-up appointments with a primary physician or nurse practitioner – not to mention, all medications expire at some point. “We all have a moral responsibility to ensure that we are not wasting medication,” says Edwards.

“This is a time for solidarity. We need to all work together to ensure that we are acting responsibly both as patients and citizens. We’re going to help patients manage their symptoms, get their medications and provide support to patients as well as the healthcare system,” says Saltmarche.

The Owners Advisory Council of OPA is a team of independent and corporate pharmacy representatives who advocate on behalf of Ontario's more than 4,600 community pharmacies. Their mandate is to advise the OPA Board of Directors and staff on matters related to pharmacy economics, and to direct economic-related research and policy work at OPA.

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About the Ontario Pharmacists Association

The Ontario Pharmacists Association is committed to evolving the pharmacy profession and advocating for excellence in practice and patient care. With more than 10,000 members, OPA is Canada's largest advocacy organization, and professional development provider for pharmacy professionals across Ontario. By leveraging the unique expertise of pharmacy professionals, enabling them to practise to their fullest potential, and making them more accessible to patients, OPA is working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the healthcare system. The pharmacy sector plays a strong role in Ontario with an economic impact of more than \$6.3 billion across more than 4,600 community pharmacies, employing 60,000 Ontarians.

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