



Ontario College
of Pharmacists

Putting patients first since 1871

A CANNABIS STRATEGY FOR PHARMACY:

Enhancing Knowledge,
Protecting Patients

May 16, 2018

CANNABIS STRATEGY

for Pharmacy

On April 13, 2017, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-45, an Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts (the Cannabis Act). Upon commencement, the Cannabis Act will regulate the production, distribution and sale of cannabis for non-medical (recreational) purposes (the current program for access to cannabis for medical purposes will continue under the new Act). The Act remains subject to parliamentary approval and royal assent.

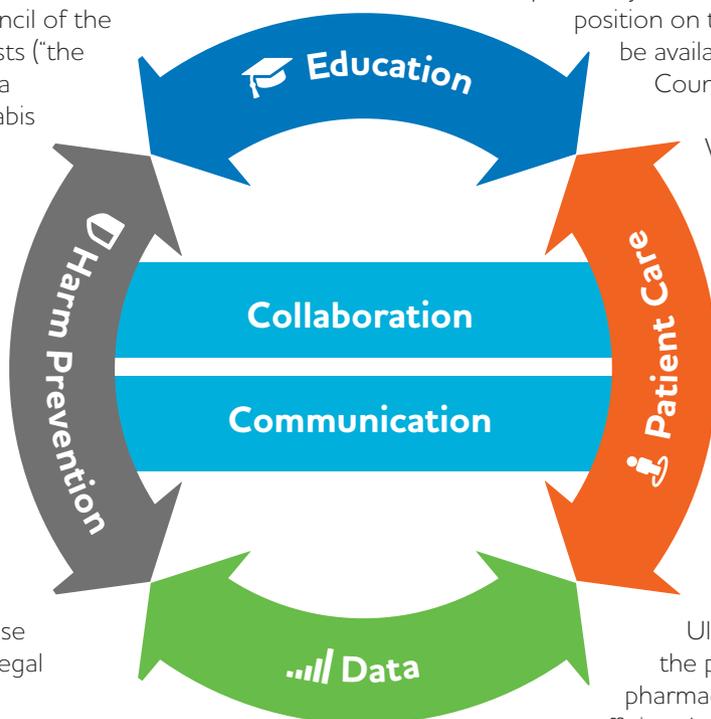
In September 2017, the Council of the Ontario College of Pharmacists ("the College") agreed to establish a task force to develop a Cannabis Strategy given the changing landscape of cannabis in Ontario. The multi-pronged Strategy simultaneously focuses on relevant areas of practice and prepares the College and pharmacy professionals to address evolving cannabis-related issues, while considering how to best serve and protect patients and Ontarians. It also reflects the health and social factors that are related to the legalization of cannabis for recreational use and the continued access to legal cannabis for medical use.

The Strategy's purpose is to facilitate the ability of pharmacy professionals to respond to changes in the pharmacy practice environment related to the use of cannabis for both medical and recreational purposes. It was created with the objects of the College in mind, namely to

"develop, establish and maintain standards and programs to promote the ability of members [pharmacy professionals] to respond to changes in practice environments, advances in technology and other emerging issues."¹ Matters related to the distribution, production and manufacturing of cannabis are not a part of this Strategy as federal and provincial governments have determined that the existing regulatory framework for the distribution of cannabis will remain in place and does not include distribution in pharmacy. Information about the College's position on the distribution of cannabis will be available on our website, subject to Council approval.

While all pharmacy professionals have a role to play in providing quality and safe patient care, the College recognizes that there are opportunities for pharmacists, in their clinical role as medication experts, to further promote quality and safety by taking into account cannabis use by patients such as through flagging drug interactions and providing relevant cannabis-related information.

Ultimately, patients and the public should expect that pharmacy professionals will have sufficient knowledge about cannabis use to contribute to positive health outcomes and prevent harm. This expectation is set in the College's view that cannabis should be treated no differently than any other drug or substance on which pharmacists already provide advice.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Strategy consists of four priorities that together, through effective communication and collaboration will support the College's mandate to serve and protect the public's interest:

- Developing and maintaining competency,
- Providing patient care, health information and advice,
- Documenting, developing and tracking data, and
- Preventing harm.

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN COMPETENCY



Engaging and accessing relevant continuing education, training and resources to respond to the changes in the pharmacy practice environment is a necessary component of providing optimal patient care.

The standard practice of the College when responding to emerging practice issues is to reinforce the pharmacy professional's duty to obtain the knowledge, skills and judgment needed to competently provide any pharmacy service safely and effectively, and to direct pharmacy professionals to appropriate resources to assist in their execution of this duty.

It can be expected that the legalization of cannabis will result in increased access, use and transparency of use by the public. As a result, pharmacists will have to consider the potential that any patient may need to be informed on the interaction of cannabis with medications (much like they do for alcohol use). While the consumption of alcohol has a long-standing history, and therefore knowledge about its health impact is readily available and commonly

considered, the recreational and medical use of cannabis is less understood and information about its health impact is far more limited. Although the expectation is that pharmacy professionals are self-directed in aligning their personal education needs to their own practice, a specific focus on education related to cannabis is an important consideration.

The College will work with key stakeholders to set expectations for appropriate education, identify potential training opportunities and help ensure resources are accessible and communicated to pharmacy professionals. This will support the appropriate role of pharmacy professionals following the legalization of cannabis for recreational purposes.

GOAL:

Pharmacists are educated on the use of cannabis for medical or recreational purposes, the benefits and risks of cannabis, and the potential interactions of cannabis with medications and health conditions.

PROVIDE PATIENT CARE, HEALTH INFORMATION AND ADVICE



While the landscape of cannabis, both recreational and medical, takes shape, pharmacists are expected to address evolving patient needs. Furthermore, with the legalization of cannabis for recreational purposes, individuals may use this route (due to ease of access) to access cannabis for medical purposes, without the

guidance of a health professional. Patients could be looking to receive information about the benefits and risks, and health advice from pharmacists regarding appropriate uses, strains, routes of administration and interactions with drugs and other substances. Therefore, pharmacists will need to plan how to respond to the potential increase of patients seeking advice associated with cannabis. This includes being prepared to inform them of when evidence based knowledge is not available to provide conclusive advice.

Like with alcohol, tobacco, or any medication or substance, pharmacists should have a foundational understanding of cannabis. While reports of serious adverse side effects have been rare with cannabis, some adverse interactions are known to occur when cannabis is used with certain medications.² Pharmacists have an opportunity to educate the public and patients on cannabis and its interaction with medications and treatments.

GOAL:

Pharmacists use their knowledge and skills to provide information and advice to patients that considers the efficacy, benefits and risks of cannabis, and its interaction with medications, other treatments and health conditions.

1 Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, SO 1991, c 18: Schedule 2 Health Professions Procedural Code, s.3 (1)10.

2 United States, Congress, Department of Health, et al. "Medical Cannabis: Adverse Effects and Drug Interactions." Medical Cannabis: Adverse Effects and Drug Interactions. Government of the District of Columbia, 22 Dec. 2015.

3 Berg, Carla J., et al. "Perceived Harm, Addictiveness, and Social Acceptability of Tobacco Products and Marijuana among Young Adults: Marijuana, Hookah, and Electronic Cigarettes Win." Substance use & misuse 50.1 (2015): 79-89. Web. 23 Mar. 2018



DOCUMENT, DEVELOP AND TRACK DATA



Documentation is a key element of every health profession's standard of practice. It supports delivery of patient care through inter- and intra-professional communication and demonstrates a member's professional

judgment through the interventions and recommendations made on behalf of the patient. It will be important for pharmacists to document patient use, response, and experience with cannabis, to create a comprehensive patient profile and encourage patient care that is as holistic and evidence based as possible.

Currently, data regarding cannabis consumption, its impact, use, and benefits and risks to patients is incomplete. Increased use and experience with cannabis, as well as strong

clinical documentation, will provide an evolving evidence base from which to build a more complete understanding of the use of cannabis and its impact on a patient's health outcomes. This will present an opportunity for the College to support the profession's participation in research efforts to strengthen evidence and inherently improve patient care.

GOAL:

Pharmacists document patients' cannabis use and other data, such as healthcare or clinical data, to create a comprehensive patient profile.

The College supports the profession's participation in research efforts with various stakeholders to strengthen the evidence base on cannabis use.

HARM PREVENTION



As healthcare professionals, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have a duty to ensure that patients are not harmed by their medications and receive benefit from therapy, as well as contribute to broader strategies aimed at promoting patient

safety. This can include collaborating with all members of the patient's care team to ensure an integrated approach to a patient's health care and the health-related information and education they receive.

While most research shows that cannabis is not seen as highly addictive, there are other concerns related to cannabis such as its use by patients to self-medicate potentially undiagnosed conditions and untreated symptoms, as well as concerns related to youth consumption.³ Pharmacists can play an important contributory role to delaying the consumption of cannabis by youths, which may help prevent long-term adverse effects. Pharmacists can also identify patients who may be self-medicating, and determine the need for referral to alternative health services. Pharmacists should also expect that patients may access cannabis through unregulated sources and be

prepared to address potential dangers and subsequent risks. Furthermore, just as there is an expectation for pharmacists to assist patients to quit consuming tobacco smoke, pharmacists should be prepared to recommend alternative routes of administration of cannabis, if appropriate.

Pharmacy professionals are well positioned to integrate harm reduction strategies into the current pharmacy practice environment to support increased patient access to alternative services or therapies and decrease the negative consequences of drug use. It is therefore important that pharmacy professionals apply harm reduction approaches through collaboration with multi-disciplinary stakeholder groups to promote optimal patient care.

GOAL:

Pharmacists are engaged in supporting patients in accessing appropriate health services and applying harm prevention strategies in collaboration with regulated healthcare professionals and public health stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

As society and the profession of pharmacy adapt to the rapidly evolving realities and implications of the increase of cannabis use, the College recognizes that good communication and collaboration between and among pharmacy professionals and organizations has been, and will remain, a cornerstone of our collective responsibility to provide patient-centred care and promote safe pharmacy practice. Consequently, all four of the priorities expressed in this strategy rely on effective collaboration, communication and both professional and patient education. The College will continue to work with stakeholders, pharmacy professionals and patients to bring this strategy to life and to contribute to the College's role as a responsive and responsible pharmacy regulator as the use of, and access to, cannabis in our society evolves over time.

