Fact Sheet: Recommending and Administering Over-the-Counter Medications or Medical Supplies and Equipment

In certain practice settings where nurses[1] provide care, clients may have questions about or benefit from the use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications or medical supplies and equipment (MSE). This fact sheet will provide nurses with the information required to safely recommend or administer OTC medications or MSE.

What are Over-the-Counter Medications and Medical Supplies and Equipment?

OTC medications and MSE are intended to treat minor illnesses or symptoms and support self-monitoring of health conditions. OTC medications may include, for example, mild pain relievers, allergy medications, and/or herbal medicines. OTC MSE may include diabetic supplies, a blood pressure monitor, or wound care supplies.

Scope of Practice

OTC medications do not require a prescription, and nurses may recommend or administer them to a client. However, in some practice settings, legislation or employer policy might require an order. Additionally, prescriptions may be requested so clients can be reimbursed by insurance (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2023).Recommending and administering OTC medications or MSE are part of the nurse's scope of practice if they have the knowledge, skill, and judgement to do so safely and ethically. In order to determine if a certain medication is an OTC medication, the nurse must consult the Health Canada's Drug Product Database.

Employer Policy

Employer policy must be in place authorizing the nurse to recommend or administer OTC medications or MSE. In settings where clients would benefit from this practice, and no such policy exists, nurses should advocate for and contribute to the development and implementation of a supporting policy (Nurses Association of New Brunswick, 2019).

Third-Party Insurance

Third-party insurance companies may not compensate clients for OTC medications or MSE recommended by a nurse. Nurses must ensure clients are aware of this so they can make informed decisions about their health care.

Federal Public Drug Benefit Programs

The Government of Canada provides prescription drug coverage from various programs to members of eligible groups. These groups include First Nations and Inuit, eligible members of the Canadian Armed Forces, qualified veterans by Veterans Affairs Canada, members of the Royal

[1] For the purpose of this document, the term "nurse" refers to graduate nurses, and registered nurses.

Canadian Mounted Police, and offenders in federal correctional institutions. For more information consult the following link: Federal Public Drug Benefit Programs.

Roles and Accountabilities

When making decisions and taking action, nurses are accountable to meet their standards of practice at all times. If a nurse decides to recommend an OTC medication or MSE, they are accountable for the recommendation and for any outcomes of that recommendation. To recommend or administer an OTC medication or MSE, the nurse must:

- have the knowledge, skill, and judgment to do so safely and ethically;
- follow employer policies;
- perform a nursing assessment to determine if the client's condition warrants an OTC medication or MSE;
- have knowledge of the potential side effects and drug interactions that may result from the use of an OTC medication or MSE;
- have knowledge of which medications are classified as OTC in Health Canada's Drug Product Database;
- only recommend or administer an OTC medication or MSE for which they have competence and authority;
- educate clients on all aspects of OTC medication or MSE;
- document recommendation for, or administration of, an OTC medication or MSE according to employer policy;
- complete any insurance or program forms as required;
- use regulatory and other related documents to support safe and competent practice (e.g., *Standards for Medication Management* and *Standards for Documentation*);
- collaborate or consult with an authorized prescriber when client's needs change or if these needs can no longer be managed by an OTC medication or MSE;
- collaborate or consult with a pharmacist as required; and
- collaborate with an appropriate member of the health care team when specific expertise is required related to an OTC medication or MSE.

Please contact a Nurse Consultant at practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca for further support or if you have questions related to this or any other topic.

References

College of Nurses of Ontario. (2023). *Recommending over-the-counter medications*. https://www.cno.org/en/learn-about-standards-guidelines/educational-tools/ask-practice/recommending-otc-medications/

Nurses Association of New-Brunswick. (2019). *Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses*. https://nanb.nb.ca/en/library/document/standards-of-practice-for-registered-nurses/

Content of this fact sheet has been adapted from the Nova Scotia College of Nursing Nurses' *Recommending and Administering Over the Counter Medications or Devices* (2024).