

NURSES RECOMMENDING AND ADMINISTERING
OVER THE COUNTER MEDICATIONS OR DEVICES

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The Nova Scotia College of Nursing is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants.

INTRODUCTION

Nurses¹ provide care to clients in clinical settings where clients may have questions about or benefit from the use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications or devices². This guideline will provide nurses with the information that they require to safely recommend or administer OTC medications or devices.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Over the counter medications including herbal medications and OTC devices (e.g. wound care supplies, diabetic supplies) do not require a prescription and are not part of the act of prescribing. Prescribing is an act in which an authorization, in writing or otherwise, is communicated directly to a pharmacist, certified dispenser or other person authorized by law. Nurse practitioners are the only nurse in Nova Scotia authorized to prescribe.

RNs may recommend and administer OTC medications or devices as long as they have the knowledge, skill and judgement (competence) to do so. The RN must ensure the OTC medication or device they are recommending is treating an already diagnosed condition and not new symptoms which would require further assessment by a nurse or medical practitioner. LPNs are authorized to recommend OTC medications or devices only in the **limited** specific context of [advanced foot care practice](#), as long as they have the competence to do so.

Please Note: the term nurse is used in the remainder of this guideline; however, circumstances under which an LPN may recommend an OTC medication or device is so limited, **it is most likely** that from this point forward, the word ‘nurse’ refers only to the RN.

EMPLOYER POLICY

An employer policy must be in place authorizing the nurse to recommend or administer OTC medications or devices. Without a policy, recommending or administering OTC medications or devices **is not** within the scope of employment of the nurse. Nurses should work with their employer to implement a policy enabling this practice if there is evidence clients would benefit from it.

THIRD PARTY INSURANCE

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

NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

The department of Indigenous Services Canada’s Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program provides eligible First Nations people and Inuit with a range of medically necessary health related items and services that are not covered by other insurance plans.

The NIHB Program provides coverage for OTC medication, medical supplies and equipment (MSE) and a range of other services. As of December 17, 2018, RNs³ working with eligible client populations may make recommendations for OTC medications and devices falling under the program mandate.

For more information please see the Q&A [Nurses Recommending Medical Supplies and Equipment under the Non-insured Health Benefits Program](#).

1 LPNs, RNs and NPs unless otherwise stated.

2 Devices are defined as any article or healthcare product intended for use in the care, treatment or prevention of disease, which does not achieve any of its primary intended purposes by chemical action or by being metabolized. This could include but is not limited to; wound care and ostomy supplies, diabetic supplies, etc.

3 At this time, only RNs and NPs may make OTC and device recommendations under the NIHB Program.

ROLES AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

Nurses are accountable to meet their standards of practice and for their decisions, actions and the outcomes of those actions at all times. To recommend or administer an OTC medication or device, the nurse must:

- follow employer policies;
- perform a nursing assessment to determine if the client's condition warrants an OTC medication or device;
- use current evidence (e.g., research, other credible sources) to support the decision to recommend or administer an OTC medication or device;
- be knowledgeable about the potential side effects and drug interactions that could result from the use of an OTC medication or device;
- be knowledgeable about which medications are classified as OTC. OTC medications are in schedule III (Appendix A) of the [National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities: NAPRA](#)
- only recommend or administer an OTC medication or device for which they have competence and authority;
- Do not recommend medications for which they have no authority (medications in schedules I or II of the Drug Schedules Regulations made under Nova Scotia's [Pharmacy Act](#));
- educate clients on all aspects of OTC medication or devices;
- document recommendation for, or administration of, an OTC medication or device according to employer policy;
- complete any insurance or program forms as required;
- use regulatory and other related documents to support safe practice (e.g., [Medication Guidelines for Registered Nurses](#), [Medication Administration Guidelines for Licensed Practical Nurses](#), [Documentation Guidelines for Nurses](#));
- collaborate or consult with an authorized prescriber when clients' needs change or if these needs can no longer be managed by an OTC medication or device;
- collaborate or consult with a pharmacist as required (e.g., possible interaction with other prescribed and/or non-prescribed drug therapies); and,
- collaborate with an appropriate member of the health care team when specific expertise is required related to an OTC medication or device (e.g. occupational therapist for assistive devices).

NEED SUPPORT OR HAVE A QUESTION?

Contact a Practice Consultant at practice@nscn.ca if you need support or if you have questions about this or any other topic.