

Communications Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**New Canadian Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids
Welcomed by Peterborough Drug Strategy Task Force**

*Medical Officer of Health Encourages Medical Practitioners
to Employ New Guidelines*

Monday, May 31, 2010, Peterborough

Doctors now have formal guidance on how to best prescribe powerful opioid narcotics for pain management – while minimizing the risk of addiction or diversion. The release of the new “Canadian Guideline for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-cancer Pain” earlier this month is welcome news for the Peterborough Drug Strategy Task Force that has been working to raise awareness of prescription opioid misuse and diversion for over a year.

The recent Medicine Cleanout Campaign as well as several film showings, speaking engagements, media articles and school projects are part of efforts to raise awareness of the concern of prescription opioid misuse and diversion.

“Whenever we do these talks and presentations, we’re often being asked ‘what about the prescribing doctors?’” said Suzanne Galloway, a health promoter at the Peterborough County-City Health Unit. “We’ve been eagerly anticipating the prescribing guidelines for some time, since we know doctors are in a hard position. They need to effectively manage pain and opioids are an excellent tool for this. On the other hand, we are seeing alarming rates of addiction and trafficking locally.”

Donna Rogers, the Executive Director of FourCAST, reported that “we are seeing an increasing number of people presenting for service who have opioid dependence and the majority of those have begun opioid use through medical treatment for pain management.” FourCAST currently collaborates with doctors on a case by case basis to provide support about weaning patients from opioid use, the implications for discontinuing use, and the provision of addiction counseling to patients. Ms. Rogers welcomes more of this sort of collaboration.

It is a concern when patients who find themselves dependent on opioids are not offered ways to manage their dependence – or their ongoing pain. Wayne Ducker, an outreach worker with PARN – Your Community AIDS Resource Network, has heard first hand stories of patients resorting to the streets when they cannot get their prescription. “The concern is that cutting

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people off cold turkey is going to be devastating for the individual. Someone who is accustomed to a certain dose of an opioid is going to get very sick. Naturally, they'll have to look for that quantity somewhere else. If it means illegal purchasing, then that's what they're going to do."

To feed demand, there is supply. The street value of opioids seized by Peterborough police has risen from \$2,000 in 2006 to \$24,000 in 2008. According to Inspector Tim Farquharson of the Peterborough Lakefield Community Police Service, "we have concerns over the trends we are seeing in our City and area over the past few years in respect to the quantities of powerful opioids people are being prescribed. There is no age group or social status that hasn't been affected by the issues surrounding opioid dependence, whether in the use of or trafficking in these drugs. The monetary street return on these substances is very tempting for people to divert the drugs to non-legitimate buyers. We are working with our community partners on proactive strategies to deal with the illicit use of opioids."

All evidence suggests that the majority of prescription narcotics are not finding their way to the street by means of pharmacy theft or prescription forgery but rather through legal prescriptions written by a physician and dispensed by a pharmacy. The solution to this complex problem is not an easy one.

Promoting the 150-page prescribing guidelines to area physicians is a critical next step to reducing the concern of opioid misuse and diversion. The Peterborough County-City Health Unit is partnering with the regulatory body for physicians, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to offer a workshop to area doctors in the fall of 2010.

Meanwhile, the Health Unit is seeking medical practitioners to provide planning advice for the workshop and professional insight on what other tools or measures can be put into place locally to reduce prescription opioid misuse and diversion. "This is a complex issue and we welcome the participation of local medical practitioners to identify ways to ensure optimal patient care while reducing the opportunity for diversion or addiction," said Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health.

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