

## Can Nurse Practitioners Prescribe Controlled Drugs?

**ANSWER: No, not yet. The federal legislation allowing nurse practitioners (NPs) to prescribe controlled drugs has been passed but provincial policies and procedures must be in place before nurse practitioners can begin this practice. According to a communication with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association (SRNA) in November, it is anticipated that NPs who have taken the required training will be able to prescribe controlled drugs early in 2014.(1) Watch for an announcement from the SRNA and /or the Saskatchewan College of Pharmacists (SCP).**

### **PRESCRIPTION PRIVILEGES - NURSE PRACTITIONER**

Subject to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (Canada) and the bylaws of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association, a registered nurse who is entitled pursuant to The Registered Nurses Act, 1988 to practise in the nurse practitioner category may prescribe any drug listed in Schedule I, II or III that is intended for the purpose of treating humans.(2) Previous legislation and regulations authorized NPs to independently diagnose and treat health conditions but limited prescribing authority. On November 21, 2012, the federal government approved new regulations under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* that removed federal restrictions on Nurse Practitioner authority to prescribe controlled substances. The new regulations will allow NPs to prescribe controlled substances under the federal *Controlled Drug and Substances Act*.(3)

Provincial and territorial (P/T) governments are responsible for regulating health professionals, and have been consulted in the development of these changes. In order to support the efforts of P/T ministries of health in enhancing flexibility and timeliness in health care service delivery, Health Canada has developed the New Classes of Practitioners Regulations (NCPR). These regulations provide a means of authorizing midwives, nurse practitioners and podiatrists to prescribe, administer and provide controlled substances with certain exceptions where applicable, **provided they are also authorized to prescribe controlled substances under P/T legislation, regulation or policy**. The following exclusions of controlled substances apply to each new class of practitioners respectively:

- For midwives and podiatrists: heroin, cannabis (marihuana), opium, coca, methadone, buprenorphine, amphetamine, benzphetamine, methamphetamine, phenmetrazine, phendimetrazine and anabolic steroids
- For nurse practitioners: heroin, cannabis (marihuana), opium, coca and anabolic steroids (except testosterone) (4)

The above-noted exclusions of controlled substances were decided based on the risk of diversion and/or abuse associated with the different substances, specific regulatory requirements in the Narcotic Control Regulations, Part G of the Food and Drug Regulations and the Marihuana Medical Access Regulations attached to their use, and the scopes of practice of affected health professionals. For example, nurse practitioners are often involved in treating transgender sex reassignment patients and thus require the authority to prescribe testosterone. (4)

Under these Regulations, new practitioners have to meet the same requirements with regard to record-keeping, security, loss and theft reporting as existing practitioners. As these health professionals are not regulated in all provinces and territories, and as their scopes of practice do not always authorize them to prescribe controlled substances, the NCPR may only have effect in some provinces and territories. (4)

The SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association) has established that the National and SRNA RN(NP) Standards and Competencies are broad enough to include prescribing of narcotics and controlled substances. SRNA has developed an Interpretation of the Standards for prescribing. (5) Mandatory education is one of the requirements of this legislation. RN (NP)'s must successfully complete an education module in order to prescribe drugs listed in this legislation. (1) In addition, there are a few outstanding policies /procedures which need to be worked out before NPs can begin prescribing controlled drugs in Saskatchewan.(1)

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medSask, Your Medication Information Service  
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#### References:

- 1) Personal communication with Donna Cooke, Nursing Advisor, Policy, SRNA. November 22, 2013.
- 2) The Drug Schedules Regulations, 1997. The 2010 Update. Available at [https://scp.in1touch.org/uploaded/58/web/site/Drug\\_Schedules\\_Regulations\\_1997\\_The\\_2010update.pdf](https://scp.in1touch.org/uploaded/58/web/site/Drug_Schedules_Regulations_1997_The_2010update.pdf). Accessed September 2013.
- 3) Factsheet: New Classes of Medical Practitioners Regulations. Available at [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/nr-cp/\\_2012/2012-71bk-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/nr-cp/_2012/2012-71bk-eng.php). Accessed September 2013.  
3) New Classes of Practitioners Regulations. Available at <http://canadagazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2012/2012-11-21/html/sor-dors230-eng.html>. Accessed September 2013.
- 4) RN(NP)s Prescribing Narcotics, Controlled Drugs and Substances Safely and Effectively in Saskatchewan – Coming Soon. Available at <http://www.srna.org/index.php/component/content/article/4-main-section/nurse-practitioner/246-rn-np-s-prescribing-narcotics-and-controlled-drugs-and-substances-safely-and-effectively-in-saskatchewan-coming-soon>. Accessed September 2013.
- 5) RN(NP) Workshop "What you Need to Know". Available at [http://www.srna.org/images/stories/pdfs/registration/cdsa\\_brochure\\_2011\\_07\\_21.pdf](http://www.srna.org/images/stories/pdfs/registration/cdsa_brochure_2011_07_21.pdf). Accessed September 2013.