

Pharmacist Prescriptive Authority – Information for the Public

1. What does pharmacist prescriptive authority mean for me and my family?

Under a combination of federal and provincial laws, most drugs are only available by prescription. That is because it takes a trained professional to make the decision that these drugs are appropriate for you. When that decision occurs, that professional writes a prescription for you when the law permits.

The laws in Saskatchewan allow pharmacists to prescribe medications under certain situations where they are trained to do so. This gives the pharmacist added flexibility to respond to a variety of situations without having to check with your primary health care provider first.

2. Does this mean that I no longer need a doctor for my medications?

No, the pharmacists' ability to prescribe drugs does NOT replace the care you receive from your doctor or other health care providers, such as nurse practitioners or other authorized nurses, dentists, optometrists, midwives and podiatrists.

Pharmacists are trained differently than doctors. Doctors are trained to diagnose the more serious ailments for which you cannot look after yourself and need a medical diagnosis. Pharmacists are trained to recognize what medications might be the best for you given the diagnosis made by your doctor.

There are also some drugs that a pharmacist cannot prescribe, such as Controlled Substances, which include narcotics and other mood-modifying drugs, which fall under federal laws.

A close working relationship between you, your primary health care provider and your pharmacist will help you receive optimal care.

3. How can pharmacist prescribing authority help me?

For some less serious ailments for which you can look after yourself, your pharmacist may be able to help you by prescribing a more effective prescription drug. This is explained further below under minor ailments. However, the following are some other examples where a pharmacist can make prescribing decisions for you and then notify your primary health care provider:

- **Continuing maintenance therapy** - You are taking medications regularly; your prescription has run out and you can't get in to see your doctor for several days. Your pharmacist can provide the supply you need until you are able to visit your doctor and will let your doctor know.

- **Unable to access medications** – You are taking medications regularly. You are on a trip and have left your medication at home. A pharmacist may provide you with a supply until you return home and will let your doctor know.
- **Emergencies (defined as a life-threatening situation)** – You are without your medication that you take once in a while when needed, or perhaps regularly. Your pharmacist will assess your situation to determine if it is life-threatening. Depending on the situation, your pharmacist may prescribe for you or refer you to another health care provider.
- **Physician's absence** - Doctors sometimes temporarily leave their practices for extended periods of time, such as for vacation or education. When that happens, they can leave instructions with your pharmacist to continue the medications for you and other patients if prescriptions run out while they are away.
- **Seamless care** - When you are ill and admitted to a health care facility, your medications can change. If you are transferred from one health care setting to another, for example you are discharged from a hospital and return to your community, your pharmacist can make sure that your new medication therapy continues uninterrupted. Again, your pharmacist will let your doctor know.
- **Self-care for minor ailments** – see questions 6 and 7

4. How will my doctor know what you are prescribing to me? Do I need to bring in my prescription? Who will keep my medication history?

When a pharmacist prescribes for you, they will fax a record of it to your primary health care provider. For residents with a Saskatchewan Health Card, your medication history is recorded in Saskatchewan's Pharmaceutical Information Program (PIP). The PIP gives health care providers secure online access to the information they need to make the best drug therapy decisions for you. When a pharmacist prescribes, you may choose to have the prescription filled at any pharmacy location.

5. Are there times when the pharmacist is able to prescribe, but decides not to?

Yes. As with other health professionals, pharmacists use their professional judgement to assess whether they have the knowledge to prescribe in your best interests. If they do not, then they will refer you to a health care provider who can help you with your condition.

Pharmacists may also refuse to provide services to you for moral or religious reasons. In these cases, they must refer you to a health care provider who can provide you with care.

6. How do I know if my ailment is minor and what if it gets worse? Is this safe?

A minor ailment is generally a condition that is less serious, it may not last long and for which you can look after yourself, instead of seeing your doctor (e.g. severe insect bites, cold sores). See [SCPP's Website "Health Care Services Provided by Your Pharmacist"](#) for a list of Minor Ailments or Conditions that a pharmacist may assess and prescribe a drug.

These conditions have been approved for pharmacist prescribing as the drugs used are very safe and pharmacists must follow clinical guidelines for prescribing. These guidelines identify situations where the pharmacist will refer you to your primary health care provider for your own safety.

Many medications and remedies are also available to you, over the counter, without a prescription to help treat these ailments. Your pharmacist will help you to assess whether a prescription drug may be a better option for you than an over-the-counter medication.

7. What happens if the minor ailment turns out to be more serious?

Your pharmacist will work with you to determine the success of the treatment, usually by following up with a telephone call. If for example the drug does not work as well as it is supposed to or your condition is more serious, your pharmacist will refer you to your primary health care provider.