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New Brunswick College of Pharmacists Ordre des pharmaciens du Nouveau-Brunswick

Guideline: Assessing the Authenticity of Prescriptions

BACKGROUND

The ordering of prescriptions has significantly evolved over the years. Prescriptions are not only conveyed through pen and paper or verbal means but through the use of electronic transmission¹ with electronic signatures². *Signing* a prescription no longer refers to only a pen-and-ink signature. Technology has facilitated the use of various modalities.

Pharmacy professionals are *obliged to ensure that a prescription is authentic and refuse to dispense the drug if there is doubt as to the authenticity of the prescription*. [Regulations, Section 17.10 (a) (b)].

Given the diversity of pharmacy practice and variability in prescribing methods, stringent or restrictive methods for confirming the authenticity of a prescription may not always be applicable or appropriate. These restrictive approaches may impede patient access to health care. A principles-based approach allows for the application of professional judgment and takes the nuances of each prescription into consideration.

This guideline was developed to support pharmacy professionals in applying their professional judgment to evaluate and confirm the authenticity of a prescription. The set of actions outlined below do not preclude the need to exercise caution and vigilance to mitigate the risk of dispensing medication subsequent to a forged prescription. Pharmacy professionals are also reminded to use caution when a forgery is suspected in the interest of personal safety, as well as that of pharmacy staff.

¹ "Electronic transmission" of a prescription means communication of an original prescription or refill authorization by electronic means, to include computer-to-computer, computer-to-facsimile machine, facsimile machine to facsimile machine, facsimile machine to computer or e-mail transmission which contains the same information it contained when the authorized prescriber transmitted it but does not include a telephoned order.

² "Electronic signature" means an electronic sound, symbol, or process attached to or logically associated with a record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.

GUIDELINE: Pharmacy professionals must critically assess prescriptions and apply professional judgment in determining authenticity.

Actions that may support assessing prescription validity include, but are not limited to:

- a. Evaluating unique identifiers (e.g., handwritten or digital signatures, time-stamp encryption of information, voice characteristics);
- b. Evaluating the prescription content (i.e., terminology and symbols employed, expression, appropriateness of the dosage, quantity, patient instructions and drug being ordered);
- c. Evaluating the prescription for typical prescriber patterns and practices;
- d. Consulting with other pharmacy professionals familiar with the prescriber's ordering practices;
- e. Reviewing the patient's medical history for corroborating information regarding indication or previous medication therapy (patient profile, DIS);
- f. Contacting the prescriber or a reliable representative of the prescriber, to confirm validity
- g. Verifying the authentication technologies³ with the prescriber;
- h. Confirming with the prescriber, the electronic generation and/or transmission contains end-to-end encryption⁴.

In addition to authenticating prescriptions, pharmacy professionals must comply with prescription requirements as described within:

- [Regulations of the New Brunswick College of Pharmacists](#)- Sections 17.2, 17.11, 17.28
- [Narcotic Control Regulations](#)- Section 34
- [Model Standards of Practice for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians in Canada](#)- Section 1.3.3

In instances where authenticity is questioned, the pharmacy professional must document the process for assessing the validity of the prescription. The documentation should be conspicuous when a prescription is retrieved and kept as part of the 15-year record.

³ Examples of authentication technologies include hardware tokens or biometric identification. Additional caution should be exhibited when verifying authentication technologies as these tools can easily be accessed by non-prescribers.

⁴ End-to-end encryption converts information into code thereby preventing unauthorized access.