

The Pharmacist in Home Care

The Ontario Home Care Association (OHCA) advocates for the creation of a strong, reliable and accessible home care system that allows all Ontarians the opportunity to recover or manage their health care issues and age at home surrounded by family, friends and their community to which they can continue to make a meaningful contribution.

Home care services help people with acute, chronic, palliative or rehabilitative health care needs to live safely and independently in their community. A successful home care system appropriately utilizes and integrates all members of the team enabling access to case management, family physicians, nursing, therapies, community pharmacists and personal support. Each interdisciplinary member has a unique body of knowledge and scope of practice that is valued for the contribution to effective client care.

Pharmacists have unique expertise in medication management. They are responsible not only for the procurement and dispensing of medications, but also for their safe and effective use in the prevention of disease and the promotion of health and wellness.¹ As medication expert, the pharmacist makes an important contribution to the multidisciplinary team by serving as a resource for the increasing numbers of medications prescribed to seniors in particular. In 2009, almost two out of three (63%) Canadians age 65 and older took five or more prescription drugs, with close to one-quarter (23%) taking 10 or more.²

People who take several medications are more likely to have adverse drug reactions and are more vulnerable to medication related errors at times of transition such as from hospital to home or home to hospital.³ Careful medication reviews are essential to ensure that individuals are not taking medicines that negatively interact.

Managing medications in the home setting is a unique challenge. Family and friends provide the majority of care, and medications are stored and managed differently from home to home. Clinicians must respect the individual rights of clients and their caregivers within their own homes, must be adept at assessing potential risks and providing health education related to proper medication management within each setting. Comprehensive assessments, good communication with other members of the health team and time spent clarifying medication-related questions are some of the strategies that staff employ to enhance medication safety at home.

¹ Ontario Pharmacists' Association website - <http://www.opatoday.com/index.php/advocacy/scope-of-practice.html>

² Canadian Institute for Health Care Information. (2011) Health Care in Canada: A Focus on Seniors and Aging
http://www.cihi.ca/cihi-ext-portal/internet/en/document/health+system+performance/quality+of+care+and+outcomes/release_01dec11

³ Canadian Patient Safety Institute (2012). *Medication safety movement growing*.
<http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/950157/medication-safety-movement-growing>

Ontario's MedsCheck Program, originally launched in 2007, now provides for medication review by a pharmacist to homebound individuals, typically those that are frail and elderly and/or living in isolated settings.⁴ These visits help to educate clients and their families on their medication therapy ultimately contributing to improved health care outcomes and quality of life. Through this program the home care team also benefits from the pharmacist's expertise regarding medication administration, storage, side effects and compatibility with other treatments. Currently only one in-home review by the pharmacist per year is permitted.⁵

OHCA members support an enhanced role for the community pharmacist as a resource to home care clients and their formal and informal caregivers. Home care providers too often witness medication mismanagement – it is estimated that approximately 50 percent of prescriptions are not properly taken by seniors and that up to 20 percent of hospitalizations of those over 50 years of age are a consequence of medication issues.⁶ As a member of the team, the pharmacist can serve to facilitate communication to the community pharmacy and hospital pharmacy team and enable effective linkages across the health care system in order to improve the level of medication safety.⁷ Effective management of medication by individuals with long term and chronic illness has the potential to reduce unnecessary ER presentations and hospital visits, and ultimately, help to control health care costs. Most importantly, medication management improves client care and health outcomes.

The OHCA endorses *Ontario's Action Plan for Health*, which is supportive of home-based care. Organizing care around the individual at home requires all the skills of the interdisciplinary health care team, including the pharmacist. The right provider at the right time serves the interests and needs of each client. This approach generates best clinical outcomes, improved system utilization and ensures that Ontarians are able to get the care they need in the home.

⁴ MOHLTC website - <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/drugs/medscheck/>

⁵ MOHLTC website - http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/drugs/medscheck/medscheck_home.aspx

⁶ CAMH Healthy Aging Project. (2006). *Responding to Older Adults with Substance Use, Mental Health and Gambling Challenges*. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

⁷ Vira, T., Colquhoun, M., Etchells, E. (2006). *Reconcilable differences: correcting medication errors at hospital admission and discharge*. *Quality and Safety in Health Care*. 15(2): 122–126.



About the OHCA

The OHCA, *the voice of home care in Ontario*, is a membership association representing providers of quality home care services from across Ontario. OHCA members represent an estimated 25,000 staff collectively serving 300,000 Ontarians per year. OHCA works with families as integral partners in the delivery of home care services and estimates that members impact 1.2 million Ontarians. OHCA is dedicated to promoting the growth and development of the home and community health care sector by helping to shape health care policy, supporting members to excel, and being a leading source of information on home and community care. OHCA members are accredited through Accreditation Canada, CARF, and/or registered with the International Standards Association (ISO).

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