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The NSPMP reviews prescribing patterns throughout the province, individual prescribing practices, and patient use of controlled drugs.

Prescription Monitoring in Nova Scotia

The **Nova Scotia Prescription Monitoring Program (NSPMP)**, established in 1992, is a government-funded program administered by Medavie Blue Cross. The mandate of the Program is to promote the appropriate use of, and reduce the misuse and abuse of, controlled drugs in Nova Scotia. Legislation supporting this mandate was passed in July 2005. An independent Board of Directors governs the NSPMP and provides direction in the development of policy. The NSPMP's roles in promoting optimal health for Nova Scotian's, and its ability to act as a resource for the provinces health care professionals and organizations, are also key focuses for the Board.

How the Program Works

The NSPMP collects information on all prescriptions dispensed in Nova Scotia for controlled drugs such as narcotics and stimulant medications. This information is then analyzed to review prescribing patterns throughout the province, individual prescribing practices, and patient use of controlled drugs. As part of this analysis, the NSPMP identifies all individuals receiving prescriptions for controlled drugs from more than 3 prescribers in any 30 day period. After various factors such as diagnosis, prescriber specialty, and prescriber clinic groups are considered, the NSPMP produces letters to ensure that prescribers are aware of their patient's profile. These letters are forwarded to each prescriber in a given profile and include all prescriber names, drugs prescribed, amounts prescribed and dates dispensed.

When situations of concern with prescribing or with drug use are identified through ongoing and regular data analysis, they are referred to the NSPMP Program Operations Committee. This committee, which is comprised of physicians, dentists and pharmacists, acts as a peer review committee and determines when a case should be forwarded to a licensing body for review.

Until recently, prescription data for controlled drugs was received solely by way of a paper copy of these prescriptions from the dispensing pharmacist. The information was then manually entered into a database for analysis. The time required for mailing and data entry resulted in time lags in the availability of usable information. This, along with the growing concern around prescription drug abuse and its outcomes, led to development of an on line and real time PMP.

Transitioning to the New On-Line System

During the development of the new on-line system, great care was taken to involve the appropriate stakeholders, thereby ensuring that the program was as user friendly as possible. Prescribers and pharmacists were involved throughout the development and initial implementation of the new system. Existing pharmacy networks and software were utilized to minimize, as much as possible, the impact of the new system on their work environment.

The NSPMP has implemented a real time on line system across the province.

Software vendors have modified their software to process claims on-line and PMP staff members are there to provide detailed documentation and individual store contact to review the various aspects of the new system.

Within the pharmacy, the NSPMP appears as another third party carrier in the stores software. The prescription information is entered into the NSPMP area and is then routed to the appropriate carriers. To date, pharmacists/pharmacies have found that the system is easy to use and causes very little, if any, disruption in their workflow.

Now that providers are on-line and submitting claims electronically, the pharmacy no longer needs to forward the paper copy of the prescription to the NSPMP.

Benefits of the On-Line System

There are various benefits to this new system. In general, it significantly improves the ability of the NSPMP to provide timely and useful information to prescribers, pharmacies and pharmacists and aids in the goal of reducing the abuse of controlled drugs. Some of the specific key features of the system include the following:

- **Real time data availability**

With prescription information entered into the system at the time of dispensing, the NSPMP is able to provide prescribers and pharmacists with up to date information regarding patient use of controlled drugs. This supports more informed decisions when prescribing, dispensing and monitoring patient use of these drugs. Patient profiles are available immediately on request by contacting the NSPMP office. Specific and important information is also available to the pharmacist when dispensing these drugs through on line messaging.

- **Instant messaging at time of dispensing:**

Once the new system is implemented in their store, pharmacists receive messages regarding any controlled drugs at the time of dispensing. These messages confirm that the prescriber and prescription are valid, advises them if the prescription has been reported stolen or lost, and indicates whether the patient has received any other prescriptions for controlled drugs from other prescribers in the last 30 days, what the prescriptions were for, where they were filled and on what date. The NSPMP does not dictate the use of the information provided; what actions are taken with information from the system are at the professional discretion of the pharmacy and individual pharmacist. The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia is currently offering comprehensive education sessions for pharmacists on the new NSPMP system, which will assist them in utilizing the information provided.

- **Management of triplicate/duplicate prescription pads:**

The new system allows the NSPMP to track all triplicate/duplicate pads and each individual prescription. Each pad is associated to a specific prescriber. NSPMP staff members are able to view whether a prescription within a given pad has been used, how many pads have been provided to each prescriber, and the overall status of each pad. Staff members are also able, if requested, to void prescriptions for prescribers or mark them lost or stolen. The process of ordering pads has also been streamlined such that they can be produced and mailed the next business day.

- **Maintenance of Provider Registry:**

The new system allows the NSPMP to maintain an up to date registry of all prescribers, pharmacies and pharmacists within the province, as well as providers in other provinces who are registered with the program. Prescribers in New Brunswick, for example, are allowed to register with the program so that they can use the proper triplicate prescription when treating Nova Scotia patients. Information in this registry is utilized to verify validity of prescriptions when the pharmacy is dispensing controlled drugs.

- **Refined Data Analysis**

The more robust data warehousing of this system will allow the NSPMP to refine and extend the analysis that is completed on the collected data. In addition to the analysis currently being completed to examine prescribing patterns and individual patient drug use, the program is examining other reporting opportunities that may be of value to prescribers and pharmacists. Input from prescribers and pharmacists will be solicited as this project moves forward.

Services Available

There are several services offered through the program, which we anticipate will be extended as the implementation of the new on line system is accomplished. Current services available to prescribers and pharmacists include the following:

- **Patient Profiles**
With the Prescription Monitoring Act of July 2005, the NSPMP is able to provide prescribers and pharmacists with detailed information regarding a patient's use of controlled drugs. A report called a *Patient Profile* is available on request. This report will provide a list of any controlled drugs prescribed to a specific patient in a chosen timeframe, who prescribed them, the drug and amounts dispensed, the dates filled and the dispensing pharmacy.
- **Patient/Prescriber Contract Monitoring**
In situations where a prescriber deems a patient contract to be appropriate, they may request that the NSPMP monitor the patient's profile to ensure that the terms of the contract are being adhered to. Typically these contracts stipulate that the patient only receive controlled drugs from the contract prescriber at a particular pharmacy (if required). The NSPMP would then advise the prescriber if the patient is in breach of the contract and provide the associated details.
- **Patient Profile Monitoring**
Should a prescriber feel that a specific patient would benefit from closer monitoring, he/she can request that the NSPMP monitor the individual's profile and provide updates if any other prescribing activity occurs.
- **Methadone Program Monitoring**
The NSPMP assists Methadone clinics in monitoring patients to ensure that no other controlled drugs are being obtained during their treatment.
- **Analysis of Prescribing Patterns**
While still under development, the NSPMP has the ability to look at specific trends in prescribing in various parts of the province. Variables such as the drugs to be reviewed, the areas to be compared, the time frames involved, and so on, can be chosen within a suite of standard program reports.
- **Data Sharing for Research and Education**
The NSPMP is able to provide aggregate data for research projects and education sessions on the use of controlled drugs in the province. The Prescription Monitoring Act outlines specific privacy controls, which are consistently and carefully applied to any request for data.
- **Training and Education Services**
The NSPMP makes staff available to provide training and/or educational sessions to interested health care professionals, organizations and community groups.

Accessing Services

Services can be accessed by contacting the NSPMP office:
902-496-7123 or by email at pmp@medavie.bluecross.ca.

Interested individuals can also contact the NSPMP Manager for more information:

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