

Yukon pharmacists continue to press for change in wake of Liberal win

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Profession eyes expanded scope, reimbursement further down road.

Pharmacists in The Yukon Territory are looking forward to working with the new Liberal territorial government and to finally getting regulations supporting an expanded scope of practice. But reimbursement for services may take more time.

For years, Yukon pharmacists have called for modernizing legislation to expand their professional scope of practice and the Yukon Pharmacists Association (YPA) used the election campaign to raise awareness among the public, medical practitioners, government employees and politicians, says Josianne Gauthier, YPA's president.

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Prior to the Nov. 7 election, the Yukon Liberals expressed support for modernizing the scope of practice of pharmacists "in a manner that allows the profession to more fully utilize their expertise, while at the same time being cognizant of the risk of incurring additional service fees."

Gauthier notes that the Yukon's Pharmacists Act was written in 1955 and there isn't currently any legislation regulating pharmacies in the Yukon.

Recommendations made by an advisory committee created in 2014 led to the creation of a new Pharmacy and drug Act and repeal of the outdated Pharmacists Act and pharmacists' regulations now fall under the Health Professions Act.

However, both sets of regulations for pharmacy and pharmacists have yet to be drafted and the new law won't take effect until the regulations are ready and approved.

"Yukon pharmacists have been patient," Gauthier says. "We hope that as soon as the new government is formed, the new regulations will be put in place to allow expanded scope of practice."

She adds that Yukon is far behind other Canadian jurisdictions. "Patients are forced to go to the emergency department or interrupt their treatment if they run out of prescription refills. There is a lot of time wasted on the phone trying to get a hold of doctors while the patient has to wait for simple things – things pharmacists have the greatest knowledge to fix.

"Patients [also] end up having to pay more for their medications or their medications don't get reimbursed by their drug plan while the pharmacist could have substituted for a medication that is less expensive or covered. Yukoners don't have access to the same level of pharmacy services than the rest of the country."

Advocacy efforts will continue as YPA puts pressure on the new government and reminds them of their promises.

"We will work with them to develop and implement the new regulations," says Gauthier. "Making our healthcare system more efficient is necessary, especially with limited resources in the North. We hope to improve access to pharmacy services in the Yukon communities outside of Whitehorse. In 2016, we have access to technologies that can allow us to offer professional services to remote communities."

Once the new legislation and regulations are in place, YPA plans to address the need for reimbursement for professional services in the negotiation of their next pharmacy agreement.

“We are confident that even with reimbursement for services, there will be cost-savings for our healthcare system when pharmacists can work to their full scope of practice and therefore help prevent medication errors, adverse drug events, emergency visits, hospitalization, etc.,” says Gauthier.

“Pharmacists can do far more for their patients and our contribution in the healthcare system can alleviate the pressure on the other healthcare providers. Our contribution should be acknowledged and recognized.”
