



Guideline for RNs Recommending & Administering Nonprescription Drugs

Effective: February 2, 2021

Purpose

The CRNS develops guideline documents to support the professional practice of its members in the interest of the public. The purpose of this guideline is to provide information to support the application of the standards and competencies when Registered Nurses (RN) recommend or administer nonprescription drugs.

Regulatory Authority

The Registered Nurses Act, 1988 (the Act) provides the legislative authority for registered nurse practice in Saskatchewan. Section 15(2) of the Act enables the CRNS to create bylaws that:

- prescribe the powers and procedures of the council;
- provide for a code of professional ethics;
- set the standards for professional conduct, competency and proficiency of nurses; and
- further specify categories of practice and the rights and privileges of those categories.

CRNS Bylaw IV details the privileges and obligations of practicing members. Obligations of practicing members include adhering to the code of ethics, and the nursing practice standards and competencies that are incorporated by reference in Bylaw XV and set the standards for professional conduct, competency and proficiency of nurses.

Through the authority in the Act, Council creates and applies policies and procedures to approve standards and guidelines that set the expectations for registered nursing practice in Saskatchewan.

Although many standards, indicators and competencies may apply, the following have particular relevance when RNs recommend or administer nonprescription drugs:

- Standard 1: Professional Responsibility and Accountability
 - Being accountable and accepting responsibility for own actions and decisions
 - Recognizing individual competence limitations within the practice setting and seeking guidance as necessary
- Standard 2: Knowledge-Based Practice
 - Applying a knowledge base from nursing and other disciplines in decision-making in the best interest of the client
 - Facilitating client engagement in identifying health needs, strengths, capacities and goals
- Standard 4: Service to the Public
 - Listening respectfully to the expressed needs of clients, family and others
- Entry-level Competency - Clinician
 - Analyzing and interpreting data obtained in client assessment to inform ongoing decision-making about client health status
 - Anticipating actual and potential health risks and possible unintended outcomes
 - Developing plans of care using critical inquiry to support professional judgment and reasoned decision-making
 - Applying knowledge of pharmacology and principles of safe medication practice
 - Using strategies to promote wellness, to prevent illness, and to minimize disease and injury in clients, self and others

Introduction

Nonprescription (or over-the-counter) drugs do not require a prescription and can be purchased in local pharmacies and other retail outlets. The three types of nonprescription drugs available include:

- Schedule II drugs, which are kept in an area of the pharmacy where there is no public access and, therefore, no opportunity for independent client self-selection. These drugs require professional intervention from the pharmacist (e.g., patient assessment and patient consultation) prior to sale;
- Schedule III drugs, which must be sold in a licensed pharmacy, but can be sold from the self-selection area of the pharmacy; and,
- Unscheduled drugs, which can be sold without any professional supervision in any retail outlet (NAPRA).

Practice Expectations

RNs may recommend or administer nonprescription drugs to a client in certain practice settings provided that they have the knowledge, skills and judgment to do so safely and ethically. Employer policy may exist to guide and support this practice in the clinical setting.

RNs adhere to the [nursing practice standards](#), [entry-level competencies](#), principles of [medication management](#), and [code of ethics](#) when providing nursing care; and are accountable for safe, ethical nursing practice. When RNs choose to recommend a nonprescription drug, they are accountable for the recommendation and for the outcomes of the recommendation.

The safe recommendation and administration of nonprescription drugs requires that RNs:

- are knowledgeable about all aspects of the medication;
- ensure their decisions are informed by current evidence and best practices;
- assess the client before recommending or administering the nonprescription drug;
- teach the client about the intended therapeutic effects, any intended and unintended outcomes that might occur, potential contraindications, risks of drug interactions and side effects, and how to manage any that occur;
- refer the client appropriately to another health care provider when further assessment and care is required;
- consider the client's current care needs and health conditions;
- all prescription and other nonprescription medications currently being taken;
- the medications and resources available; the nature of care environment; and,
- document client assessment and any action or advice provided.

It is important that RNs also collaborate with the client to identify non-pharmacologic interventions that have been successfully used in the past to determine if additional options for self-management of the client's condition exist.

Ethically, RNs must not personally gain from the promotion of any recommendation or administration of any nonprescription medication.

Although nonprescription drugs do not require a prescription, there are some practice settings where legislation would require an order from an authorized prescriber (e.g., a hospital or long-term care facility). It is important for RNs to be well informed about the requirements in their specific work setting so they comply with all relevant legislation and regulations regarding medications.

If you have questions about RN practice and nonprescription drug recommendations or administration, please contact a practice advisor at 1-800-667-9945 or practiceadvice@CRNS.ca.

References

- National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA). (2020) *Drug Scheduling in Canada- General Overview*. Retrieved from <https://napra.ca/drug-scheduling-canada-general-overview>
- College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (2019). *Registered Nurse Entry Level Competencies*. Regina, SK: Author.
- College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (2019). *Registered Nurse Practice Standards*. Regina, SK: Author.

