Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé
et des Soins de longue durée

Ontario

Ontario Public Drug Programs Division
Drug Programs Policy and Strategy Branch

Hepburn Block, 9th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1R3

Telephone: (416) 212-4724
Facsimile: (416) 325-6647
www.ontario.ca/health

Division des programmes publics de médicaments de l'Ontario
Direction des politiques et des stratégies relatives aux programmes de médicaments

Édifice Hepburn, 9e étage
80, rue Grosvenor
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1R3

Téléphone: (416) 212-4724
Télécopieur : (416) 325-6647
www.ontario.ca/sante

DEC 22 2016

Canadian Pain Society
250 Consumers Road, Suite 301
Toronto, ON M2J 4V6
office@canadianpainsociety.ca

Dear Stakeholder,

**RE: Reminder Notice Regarding Upcoming Changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program Funding of Opioid Medications**

I am writing to remind you of the changes that the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (the "ministry") will implement for funding of opioid medications under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program as a result of the review and recommendations issued by the ministry's Pain Medication Formulary Review Subcommittee (the Pain Subcommittee).

As you know, the inappropriate use, abuse, and diversion of prescription narcotics has emerged as a significant public health and safety issue in Canada and other jurisdictions around the world. After the transition from OxyContin as a Limited Use benefit to OxyNEO reimbursement through the ODB's Exceptional Access Program (EAP), the ministry made a commitment to review the funding status of the other opioid medications and make changes as necessary to improve and encourage appropriate prescribing. For this purpose, the Pain Subcommittee of clinical experts was convened to conduct a class review of pain medications reimbursed under the ODB program in 2012. Members included clinical experts in pain, addiction, palliative care, clinical pharmacology, internal medicine, family practice, and pharmacy.

Based on extensive discussions with the subcommittee as well as further consideration of their recommendations by Ontario's expert advisory committee, the Committee to Evaluate Drugs (CED), and a detailed analysis of opioid utilization trends, the following drug products will be delisted from the ODB Formulary in late-January 2017, effective with the January 2017 ODB Formulary update:

- Higher strengths of long-acting opioids including:
    - Morphine 200 mg tablets;
    - Hydromorphone 24 mg and 30 mg capsules;
    - Fentanyl 75 mcg/hr and 100 mcg/hr patches; and
- Meperidine 50 mg tablets.

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Notice of these changes was first provided on July 20, 2016 in order for pharmacists and prescribers to inform patients who may be affected by these changes and allow sufficient time for transition planning, where required. A copy of the original notice is enclosed for your reference.

It is important to note that lower-strength, long-acting opioids will continue to be funded under the ODB program. Therefore, patients who may need higher doses of long-acting opioids for adequate pain management may continue to be prescribed lower-strength formulations. . It is important that healthcare providers assess patients individually and make changes to therapy in a measured manner with appropriate support and monitoring.

In addition, access to high-strength long-acting opioids will be maintained for patients requiring palliative care through the Palliative Care Facilitated Access (PCFA) mechanism and the ministry's Exceptional Access Program (EAP) according to specific clinical criteria. For more details, please consult the November 30, 2016 Executive Officer Notice, also enclosed here for your reference.

For resources on transitioning and/or tapering patients, the following may be useful:

- 2010 *Canadian Guideline for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain,* available at: http://nationalpaincentre.mcmaster.ca/opioid/documents.html

- College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario's (CPSO) Dialogue Magazine Volume 12, Issue 3, 2016, available at: http://www.cpso.on.ca/Policies-Publications/Publications/Dialogue-Magazine-Archives/Volume-12,-Issue-3,-2016

The ministry is committed to the appropriate utilization of opioids and to continue monitoring the prescribing and dispensing of narcotics. There may be further modernization in funding under the ODB Program in the future to reduce the risk of addiction and death resulting from the abuse, misuse, and diversion of these products.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter and would encourage you to share this information with your membership and/or direct stakeholders.

If you require further clarification on these changes, please send your question(s) to: PublicDrugPrgrms.moh@ontario.ca

Sincerely,

Angie Wong
Director, Drug Programs Policy and Strategy