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# health matters

APRIL 2011

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## Medication Matters

By Tony Sawinski

**D**o you take your medication(s) as prescribed by your health care provider? If not, you are not alone. About 50% of Canadians do not take their medications as prescribed. Many of us do not like the side effects; others have difficulty keeping track of multiple drug regimens or just forget to take their pills. Sometimes the problem is not liking the taste or simply having difficulty swallowing a pill.

It is important to take the medications exactly as prescribed to get the maximum benefit. Non-adherence to prescriptions is associated with increased morbidity and mortality as well as increased use of health services. So how can you avoid medication mishaps that could make your condition worse or that could have an adverse effect where you land in the hospital and even die?

You have an important role as a patient by being proactive when using medications. The following eight steps will assist your chance of a better health outcome: Talk to your health care professional, Get organized, Do not use expired medications, Pay attention to the labels, Simplify your drug regimen, Don't stop prematurely, Fill your prescriptions at one pharmacy, Use reminders.

### Talk to your health care professional

Talk to your health care professional so that you understand the following before you start taking any medication:



- 1) Why do you need a drug?
- 2) How and when do you take it?
- 3) How to store the drug?
- 4) What are the side effects and when should one contact the doctor or pharmacist if one has certain side effects?
- 5) What might happen if you do not take the drug as prescribed?

Write down the directions for taking the drug when the doctor writes you a prescription. Clarify those instructions with the pharmacist when you fill the prescription (this way you will notice if the pharmacy gives you something different). Carefully read the labels on all non-prescription or herbal remedies and check with a health care professional to see if they are safe to use with other medications. If a medication is causing unpleasant side effects, work with a healthcare professional to figure out how you might eliminate or

minimize the effects.

### Get organized

The following steps are designed to make it easier for you to organize your medications and related information:

- 1) List all medications that you take, which include prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements. In particular, you should be able to use the receipt from your pharmacist which indicates the names of the medications you use at that pharmacy plus the exact dosage.

Continued on page 4

inside

3  
HS&IC MEETING  
HIGHLIGHTS

3  
A MESSAGE FROM  
JOHNSON INC.

4  
MEDICATION  
MATTERS  
(CONTINUED  
FROM COVER  
PAGE)

6  
THYROID CANCER

7  
MEDIA CORNER

8  
ADULTERATION OF  
NATURAL HEALTH  
PRODUCTS

health matters

This publication is intended to keep RTO/ERO Health Plans participants current with matters considered at Health Services & Insurance Committee (HS&IC) meetings and to share items of interest pertaining to Health and Wellness. Districts are encouraged to use any of this information in its communications with members at meetings or via local newsletters.

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Message from the Committee Chair - April 2011

I trust that everyone is beginning to enjoy some spring weather despite the rain and strong damaging winds, after the long winter that we experienced. The HS&IC continue to work diligently on your behalf.

The HS&IC met April 11 - 13, 2011 with a full agenda. The first day was spent on training with Don Brooks and Lori MacDonald-Blundon. This ended our final training session for 2010-2011, an evaluation will be done in June as to how the committee wishes to proceed with the training for 2011-2012.

Informative and interesting presentations were heard from Joe Zadzora and Jackie Moulton, Coughin & Associates who completed the review of the health plans, Renee Mercuri on the new technology advancements of RTO/ERO provincial office, members of Mondial Assistance, John Crouse, Actuarial presentation.

Members are reminded to contact Johnson Inc. if anticipating purchasing assistive devices equipment to see if it qualifies for reimbursement under the plan.

The sub-committee under the direction of Gayle Manley have finalized plans for the upcoming D/UHR workshop to be held June 12/13 at the Courtyard Marriott-note the change of location from last year. We look forward to seeing you at the workshop.





## HSIC Meeting Highlights

April 12-13, 2011 committee meeting

1. We completed a successful fourth day of training with Don Brooks and Lori MacDonald Blundon on Monday, April 11. We will do an evaluation of the training for this year at the June meeting and decide upon future training sessions.
2. The Committee received the Health Plans Review report from Coughlin & Associates. The report was positive and the committee will study at the June meeting before releasing the findings done by Joe Zadzora and Jackie Moulton.
3. Johnson Inc reported that the top priced drugs that the RTO/ERO plan may have faced in the last year are cancer drugs –Neulasta injection with an average price of \$2 962, which increases the cell count that helps continue the chemotherapy. Neulasta is similar, and cheaper to Neupogen, but Neupogen requires more injections than Neulasta. The other two are Eloxatin and Erbitux.
4. We were reminded that individuals planning to purchase assistive devices equipment should contact Johnson Inc, first for pre-approval.
5. The Committee received a detailed session from Renee Mercuri on the new technology tools that Provincial Office is implementing.
6. The Committee continued to review the proposed plan enhancements for 2012. Costing has been received for a three year projection as well we have now asked John Crouse to report at the June meeting on how each of the proposed enhancements will impact the unallocated surplus of the plans. This information is required so that the Committee can make informed and fiduciary decisions on plan enhancements that may be implemented in January, 2012.
7. The Committee received an overview of Mondial Assistance provided by two members from the Mondial Assistance team. If in doubt before travelling contact Mondial Assistance.
8. John Crouse, Johnson Inc. presented the Actuarial Health Care Projection Model for 2011.
9. Final plans were made for the upcoming D/UHR workshop in June. We were saddened to hear the news that Bill Shepherd, a long time DHR rep for District 42, Vancouver Island had passed away as well the news of Eric Simpson, District 39, who suffered a stroke and will no longer be a DHR rep.
10. The Committee received the quarterly reports for the Health plans; Extended Health reflects a deficit whereas Semi Private and Dental are reflecting a surplus at the end of March, 2011.
11. District Health reps should have received by now the updates for their D/UHR binders.
12. The final copy of the Governance Manual was received and is now available on the RTO/ERO Members' Only website. Thanks to Roger Pitt and his committee for an excellent job. ●

## A Message from Johnson Inc.

Q. How can I get my claims reimbursements deposited directly into my bank account?

A. It's very simple. If you haven't already enrolled for direct deposit, send in a "void" cheque with your next claims submission. Note: Deposits can only be made into the same bank account from which the premiums are deducted.

Q. I'm turning 65 this year, so I'll be eligible for the provincial drug program. Do I need to maintain my Extended Health Care coverage?

A. Yes! While the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Program provides coverage for certain drugs, more than half of the drugs available in the Canadian market today are not covered by ODB. In addition, the RTO/ERO Extended Health Care Plan covers much more than prescription drugs. For example: vision care, 15 different paramedical practitioners, private duty nursing, and travel coverage (including trip cancellation and interruption/delay), just to name a few.

Q. If my dentist or pharmacist electronically submits a claim to Johnson Inc., should I send a paper copy as well?

A. No. If your claim has been sent electronically to Johnson Inc., you do not need to send a paper copy of the claim. When your dental office submits an electronic claim, they will receive a "claim acknowledgement" which tells them that Johnson Inc. successfully received your dental claim, which will be processed within three business days. Please note that dental payments will be remitted to you. The settlement of your account with your dentist remains your responsibility.

Similarly, when your pharmacist submits your drug claim electronically there is no need to mail the receipt for the patient paid amount (the dispensing fee and/or 15% co-pay). Your pharmacy will be paid directly for any eligible drug claim for which they have made an electronic submission. The portion that the pharmacist asks you to pay is the balance after Johnson Inc. has paid the RTO/ERO portion of your drug claim. ●



- 2) Jot down questions you want to ask your health care professional.
- 3) Write down your medical information. This includes emergency contact, primary physician, and allergies.
- 4) Understand the importance of taking your medications correctly.

### Don't use expired medications

Non-prescription drugs have a best-before date, so check them once a year and look at the expiry dates. Do not store leftover prescriptions "just in case." If your prescription has been changed or discontinued, return any unused drug to the pharmacy for safe disposal. Other things you should avoid make sure you NEVER:

- 1) Use your medication for any symptom of illness other than the one for which it was prescribed.
- 2) Take someone else's medication or give your medication to someone else.
- 3) Take more or less of a medication, unless directed by your health care professional.
- 4) Stop taking your medication because you start feeling better
- 5) Demand any particular drug, especially if you have seen it advertised, when your doctor explains why you don't need them.
- 6) Put off refilling your prescription if required.

### Pay attention to the labels and follow directions

Some prescription vials come with auxiliary labels or stickers with warnings: take with food, take on an empty stomach, avoid taking with alcohol or keep refrigerated. Pay attention to these warnings. Know when you should be taking your medication and how much. Do you need a measuring device?

### Simplify your dosing regimen

If you have trouble swallowing a pill, ask the pharmacist if there's a chewable tablet, or if the drug could be made available in liquid form. Some people prefer to split a tablet to make it easier to swallow, but certain drugs do not work properly if altered in any way. Check with your pharmacist or doctor before splitting any of your pills.

### Don't stop your medication prematurely

If the instructions advise you to finish the entire course of treatment, you need to do so. Otherwise, you risk having a relapse.



Don't stop taking a drug because you feel better or because you don't feel better. Some drugs may provide immediate relief of symptoms while others take longer to show benefit. It is important to complete the full course of treatment for the drugs to be safe and effective. If you are considering stopping or stop your medicine, contact your doctor immediately.

### Fill all your prescriptions at one pharmacy

Frequent a single drugstore and get to know your pharmacist just as you would any other health-care professional. This way, the pharmacist will have and be able to update a comprehensive record of your medications. That will help you take your drugs properly and reduce the chance that you'll make drug errors.

### Use reminders

If you have trouble remembering your dosing schedules, a reminder system can help. Some people post reminder notes on the fridge. Moreover, you can use the inside back cover of the RTO/ERO pocket planner where a blank table has been provided for your personal use. Try taking your medicine at the same time of day so it becomes a routine. Others keep their meds beside their toothbrush. In other words try linking your medication with a particular activity. You can use a weekly pillbox with separate compartments for each day of the week and different times of the day. Instead of coming in large vials of pills, medications can be organized into daily dosette packages, with individual doses popped, out from a blister pack. This simplifies remembering what drugs to take and when. There are also high-tech reminder tools such as auto messaging systems. These prompt your telephone to ring when it's time to take another dose.

Your pharmacist can tell you how to set up these systems. In addition, cell or smartphones can be programmed to alert you to take your medications.

A number of studies have been conducted on drug adherence. Poor drug adherence can interfere with the ability to treat many diseases, leading to greater complications from the illness, lower quality of life and even causing death. Precisely following the prescriptions will result in maximizing the benefit from your medications. Also, multifaceted interventions that target specific barriers to adherence are most effective, because they address the problems and reinforce positive behaviours. Consider using the tips provided as part of your wellness program. As you know – medication matters! ●



## Welcome to the HS&IC

Leo Normandeau, new HS&IC Member

As a newly installed member of the HSIC I haven't had much time to look back. Since my first meeting in December both Bill and I have had two training sessions, two committee meetings and hours and hours of studying 19 modules of the Online Group Health Primer Course, Introduction to Group Benefits in Canada. This requires at least 200 hours in preparation for the online exam. Happily we're both proud to say that we passed with flying colours. Considering we've only been on the committee for a few months it's been quite a stint so far.

Talk about committed RTO/ERO people, I'm so impressed with the level of expertise, commitment and dedication of our committee members. Under the competent leadership of our Chair Daisie Gregory it's amazing the amount of work we accomplish at every session. We are most fortunate in having the Johnson Inc. team of advisors and consultants with us to address the many health issues and concerns of our members and their families. The expertise and knowledge of our own RTO/ERO staff compliment the team approach of the HSIC.

Leo brings a wealth of varied experience to the HSIC. As a former teacher and principal of 23 years with the former Essex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board, Leo's had many years of experience negotiating salaries and health plans for teachers and principals across Ontario. As a member of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), Leo served as a local President, as provincial negotiator and Provincial President of OECTA. He also served on the Board of Governors of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and was on the Council of Presidents who successfully negotiated with the Ontario Government for collective bargaining legislation for Ontario teachers resulting in Bill 100.

Leo was recruited from his principalship in 1982 to serve as Director of Educational Relations for the Canadian Life and health Insurance Association (CLHIA). For ten (10) years he awarded research grants to universities, colleges and teacher professional development associations on behalf of CHLIA.

Local RTO/ERO involvement includes being a Chair of various committees, Executive Member and President of District 13 Hamilton Wentworth Haldimand. Provincially Leo serves on the RTO/ERO Provincial Executive as 2nd Vice-President. ●



## Updated Safety Information for Multaq

Sanofi-aventis Canada Inc., in collaboration with Health Canada advised of new important safety information related to liver injury, reported in patients treated with Multaq. Multaq helps control abnormal heart rate and rhythm (atrial fibrillation).

Patients should discuss with their healthcare professionals this new safety information regarding Multaq treatment. Patients treated with Multaq should immediately report to their doctors symptoms possibly suggesting liver injury (such as: loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, unusual tiredness, right upper stomach area pain or discomfort, yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes Gaundice), unusual darkening of the urine, or itching) and patients should consider obtaining periodic liver function tests.

Any case of serious liver injury or other serious or unexpected side effects in patients receiving Multaq should be reported to Sanofi-Aventis Canada Inc. or Health Canada.

Source: Health Canada, March 2011

# Thyroid Cancer

**T**hyroid cancer starts in the cells of the thyroid. The thyroid is a small gland at the front of your neck below the voice box (larynx). It is shaped like a butterfly. It has two parts, called lobes, one on each side of the windpipe (trachea). The lobes are connected by a thin piece of tissue called the isthmus. Normally you cannot see or feel your thyroid through your skin.

The thyroid makes hormones that help your body work the way it is supposed to:

- Thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3) are hormones that help control body functions, such as your heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and weight. To make T3 and T4, the thyroid needs iodine. It gets iodine from the water you drink and the food you eat.
- Calcitonin helps control the level of calcium and phosphate in your blood.

## Causes

Most people who develop one of the four main types of thyroid cancer are between ages 25 and 65. More women than men develop thyroid cancer. There is no single cause, but some factors increase the risk of developing it:

- radiation exposure,
- from radiation therapy to the head and neck during childhood,
- from radioactive fallout (for example, nuclear accidents like the one in Chernobyl),
- history of thyroid conditions, such as goitre (an enlarged thyroid) and thyroid nodules,
- family history.

Although the above are risk factors, most people develop thyroid cancer without any of these risk factors present.

## Signs and symptoms

Thyroid cancer often does not cause any symptoms in its early stages. As it grows, signs may include:

- a lump in the front of the neck, swollen lymph nodes in the neck,
- hoarseness or other voice changes
- trouble swallowing or
- breathing pain in the throat or neck that does not go away

Other health problems can also cause some of the same symptoms, such as an infection or goiter, which is why testing is important in making an accurate diagnosis.



## Diagnosing

To confirm the diagnosis, your doctor will arrange special tests, which may also be used to “stage” the cancer. The tests include imaging studies, biopsy, and blood tests.

## Treatment

### *SURGERY*

Surgery is the most common treatment for thyroid cancer. During the operation, all or part of the thyroid is removed. Surgery is done under general anesthetic and patients usually stay in the hospital for several days after the surgery.

# Thyroid Cancer

continued from page 6

## THYROID HORMONE TREATMENT

Thyroid hormone therapy, given as pills, is sometimes used to treat papillary or follicular thyroid cancer. The hormone thyroxine (T4) slows the growth of thyroid cancer cells that may be left in the body after surgery.

## RADIOACTIVE IODINE THERAPY

Radioactive iodine (also called iodine-131 or I-131) is commonly used to treat thyroid cancer. It is given either as a drink or as a capsule. Thyroid cells and cancer cells absorb the radioactive iodine. It destroys any cancer cells and normal thyroid cells that may still be in the body after surgery. The amount of radiation given, and when and how it is given, is different for each person.

## RADIATION THERAPY

External beam radiation therapy is used less often than radioactive iodine therapy.

A large machine is used to carefully aim a beam of radiation at the tumour. The radiation damages the cells in the path of the beam – normal cells as well as cancer cells.

## Post treatment

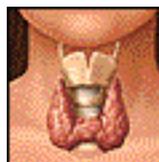
Follow-up care is done to monitor the patient's progress and recovery from treatment.

## THYROID HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

After surgery and other treatments for thyroid cancer, patients will likely need to take thyroid hormone pills for life to replace the natural hormones made by the thyroid gland.

## Quick Facts: Statistics

- In 2008, thyroid cancer received a lot of attention in the Canadian Cancer Society's statistics report. It indicated that it was the cancer seeing the most rapid growth in Canada.
- In 2010 Canadian Cancer Statistics Report stated that cancer of the thyroid went up 9.5% in females and 6.8% in men per year since 1998.
- An estimated 5,200 Canadians were diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2009, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. Four in every five cases occurred in women. The mortality rate is extremely low; the disease claimed about 80 people last year.



Thyroid Gland

Sources: Canadian Cancer Society, *The Globe and Mail*, March 2011

# media corner @

Your RTO/ERO Health Services and Insurance Committee shares as part of five meetings per annum, general health and wellness information items in the form of articles, PDFs, podcasts and websites.

## ONTARIANS CONNECT TO MORE HEALTH CARE OPTIONS – MAKING IT EASIER TO FIND THE HEALTH CARE YOU NEED!

For the first time, information about local health services is available in a single place. Using this site, people can find the nearest walk-in and after-hours clinics, urgent care centres, family health teams, general practitioners and emergency rooms by typing in their postal codes.  
[www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions](http://www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions)

## UNDERSTANDING NUTRITION LABELS

Together, the Nutrition Facts table, the nutrition claims and the ingredient list provide Canadians with more information to make informed food choices:  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt\\_formats/hpfb-dgpsa/pdf/label-etiquet/inl-eni-eng.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/hpfb-dgpsa/pdf/label-etiquet/inl-eni-eng.pdf)

## ONTARIO MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND SPORT

According to Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Living (a companion guide to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating), you will gain significant health benefits just by adding physical activity to your daily routine. Your benefits will increase as you add more activities to your day.  
<http://www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/active-living/exercise.asp>

## STAND UP TO DIABETES

Are you living with diabetes; or know someone who is? Are you interested in diabetes prevention? Or maybe you're a health care provider treating people living with diabetes. Whatever your interest, you'll find the information you need about diabetes to help yourself and others live life to its fullest. In the link below you will find information that's most relevant to you.

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/diabetes/en/public.html>

## Adulteration of Natural Health Products

**M**any natural health products (NHPs) have a history of safe use. But some products marketed or represented as NHPs have been adulterated. Products that are altered contain substances that are not declared on the label, including prescription medications or other potentially dangerous ingredients. If you use one of these products, you will be exposed to the added drugs or substances without your knowledge, which may present serious risks to your health.

NHP is an expression used in Canada to refer to a group of health products, including:

- vitamin and mineral supplements;
- herbal and other plant-based health products;
- traditional medicines (like Traditional Chinese and East Indian medicines);
- homeopathic medicines;
- omega-3 and other essential fatty acids;
- amino acid supplements;
- probiotics; and
- some personal care products (toothpastes, mouthwashes with fluoride, and anti-perspirants).

Health Canada assesses NHPs for their safety, effectiveness and quality before they are authorized for sale in Canada. NHPs that have been licensed by Health Canada are labelled with either a Natural Product Number (NPN) or a Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM).

Despite this licensing process, it is still possible to get unauthorized NHPs through retail stores or other routes (like the Internet and/or importing them from other countries). Buying unauthorized products may increase your chances of being exposed to products that have not been regulated and verified for safety and quality.

The adulteration of health products that are promoted as "natural" but contain prescription and non-prescription drugs has become a worldwide problem, especially those promoted for weight loss, body building, erectile dysfunction, sleep problems, inflammatory conditions and treatment of diabetes.

There are several potential health risks if you use products containing undeclared substances:

- The adulterated product is promoted as "safe," "natural" and without side effects, when in reality, the undeclared drug has known side effects;
- The undeclared drug may not be recommended for your disease or health condition;
- You may be allergic to the undeclared drug;
- The adulterated product may contain a dose that exceeds the maximum daily recommended dose for the drug ingredient;
- The undeclared drug may not be authorized for sale in Canada, or no longer sold in Canada because of related health concerns;
- There may be more than one undeclared drug in the product, increasing the risk of possible drug interactions and serious health effects;
- The undeclared drug may interact with certain foods and/or other health products that you may be using; and
- The undeclared drug(s) may be analogues, which are chemical compounds similar in structure to prescription drugs. The safety of these compounds may not be known or have been assessed by Health Canada, and may present a health risk.

It is important to remember that ingredients licensed for sale in Canada as prescription drugs should only be used under the supervision of a health care provider. You should never use drugs not authorized for sale in Canada.

Tell your health care provider about all health products you are using, including NHPs. If you think you are having an adverse reaction to an NHP, talk to your health care provider. Be sure to mention the other health products and substances you are using, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs, other NHPs, alcohol and special foods. This will help avoid potentially harmful interactions. Report side effects to Health Canada.

If you choose to buy NHPs online, avoid doing business with a website that refuses to give you a street address and telephone number, claims to have a "miracle cure" for any serious condition or sells NHPs that do not have either a Natural Product Number (NPN) or a Homeopathic Medicine Number (DIN-HM) on the label.



*Source: Health Canada, March 2011*