



INSIGHTS

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A small step toward universal pharmacare

Providing more people with better access to essential medicines

Ontario plans to provide a publicly-funded pharmacare system for children and youth. It's a small step in the right direction and, arguably, most important for its symbolism in a national debate. The program signals that government is taking responsibility for this component of health care, integrating it with medical and hospital care. This is as it should be.

Several commissions on Canada's healthcare system have recommended adding prescription drugs to our publicly-funded universal medicare system. No federal government has ever acted on those recommendations. Here are some reasons why they should.

The most important reason for universal pharmacare is that access to essential medicines is a human right, according to the World Health Organization. It recommends that countries protect that right in law, and with pharmaceutical policies that work in conjunction with broader systems of universal health coverage.

It would save lives. Canada's patchwork of private and public drug plans leaves millions of Canadians without coverage. As a result, Canadians are three to five times more likely to skip prescriptions because of cost than are residents of comparable countries with universal pharmacare programs.

It would save billions of dollars every year. Canadians spend 50 per cent more per capita on pharmaceuticals than residents of the United Kingdom, Sweden, New Zealand and several other countries with universal pharmacare programs. This amounts to spending \$12 billion more each year and still not having pharmacare. Why?



Because the universal pharmacare programs in other countries use their purchasing power to obtain better drug prices than our patchwork system.

It would help businesses. The rising cost of drugs are a growing burden on Canadian businesses. Part of the problem is that Canadian employers are seeing that the number of prescription drugs costing more than \$10,000 a year has grown almost 10 fold in the past decade. These increases can quickly render a work-related health plan unsustainable even if there is a stop loss component within it. It would be better to manage this on either a provincewide (like the Quebec model) or on a nationwide basis.

Our system of health care is about more than money and medicine. It is about the values that define us as a society – are we there for one another when we're at our most vulnerable? Do we place well-being above wealth? Do we believe that good health leads to good outcomes – like a stronger economy, more cohesive communities and more fulfilling lives?

The debates taking place south of our border remind us that we should never take these questions for granted.

...continued on reverse

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A small step ... continued from reverse

Our system isn't perfect. People still struggle to find a family doctor. They wait too long for specialist consultations and elective surgeries. By working together in teams with nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists and doctors we could deliver patient-centric care. Wait times for surgeries could be brought down by pooling lists among specialists. And if we were to bring prescription medicines into medicare by creating a national pharmacy system, we could save money and provide everyone with access to life-saving drugs.

Our system of universal health care is a fundamental expression of our values and a testament to Canadian's commitment to fairness.

Canadians need to get informed and get involved. If we support the idea of universal, public pharmacare, we need to let others, particularly elected officials and political candidates, know we care and that we will support a government that takes action.

If we believe that medicare is a worthy endeavour then we must also live up to those values and accept the responsibility

to make that system work, and work well. The mystery is why it has taken so long for pharmacare to catch up with medicare, leaving Canada as the only major industrialized country to have one without the other. Years from now we will wonder why it took so long to take the inevitable next step.

Until next time...

Sources: 05.2017

Danielle Martin, Better Now: Six Big Ideas To Improve Health Care for All Canadians, Wendy Levinson, MD OC, Evidence Network

What to look for when choosing Sunscreen for your kids

Recent concerns over the safety of using sunscreen on small children prompted CBC News to ask Dr. Cheryl Rosen, head of dermatology at the University Health Network in Toronto, to answer questions about sunscreen.

Here's some of the advice Rosen gave on how to protect yourself and your children against sunburn, skin cancer, premature aging and other skin damage that sun exposure can cause.

Is sunscreen safe to use on kids?

Yes, Rosen says. It's an important way to protect their skin.

Past recommendations have advised against using sunscreen on babies six months old or younger. The best practice is still to keep children that young out of the sun, she says. But if that's not possible, guidelines out of the U.S. suggest a little bit of sunscreen on their hands and face is OK.

Sunscreen is a good way to protect older babies (who are walking, and harder to keep out of the sun) and children, Rosen says. She recommends additional protection including a hat and clothing covering as much of their bodies as possible, and trying to plan outdoor activities for earlier and later in the day when the sun's rays are less intense.

How often should I apply sunscreen on my children?

Health Canada recommends reapplying sunscreen every two hours. But if children are sweating or swimming, parents and caregivers should reapply it more often.

How do I know how much sunscreen to put on?

Most people don't put on as much sunscreen as the lotion makers use while testing effectiveness, Rosen says. Make sure you cover every exposed area of your body — including often forgotten parts like the ears, she says.

What about allergies?

In response to the concerns about babies being burned, Banana Boat Canada has suggested that a bad skin reaction may be due to a sensitivity to a particular ingredient.

Sunscreens are made up of many ingredients, including not only the active compounds that absorb UVA and UVB rays to prevent them from getting into the skin, but also added fragrances and preservatives, Rosen says. None of the ingredients are toxic, she says, but it's possible that someone could have a sensitivity to an individual component.

If that's the case, it's important to get allergy testing to find out what the specific problematic ingredient is and then choose a sunscreen that doesn't contain it, rather than avoiding sunscreen altogether, Rosen says.

Are 'organic' sunscreens found in health food stores effective?

Although people say "organic" sunscreens don't contain chemicals, they do contain titanium and zinc oxide, which makes them effective, Rosen says. Make sure you use one with an SPF of 30 or higher.

What is SPF and how high should it be?

SPF, or sun protection factor, is a ratio indicating how much more time skin can be exposed to the sun with sunscreen on without burning versus if no sunscreen were used.

People should use an SPF of at least 30, Rosen says, but recommends going higher to 45 or 60 SPF to maximize protection.

But she cautions against thinking that it's OK to stay in the sun 30 times longer if you're wearing 30 SPF sunscreen, because skin damage that can lead to premature wrinkling or skin cancer occurs before the skin burns.

Sources: CBC News Posted: Jun 02, 2017

