

Benzodiazepines added to Alberta drug monitoring list

July 20, 2015 -- Prescription drug abuse and misuse is a growing and significant health issue in Alberta. To help address this issue, benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine-like medications have been added to Alberta's Triplicate Prescription Program (TPP). Benzodiazepines are drugs like Ativan and Valium.

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta operates the TPP on behalf of program partners including Alberta pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians and nurses. The program tracks the prescribing and dispensing of drugs subject to misuse and abuse, resulting in improved prescribing and better patient safety.

"If the TPP identifies high-risk prescribing patterns, we contact the physician to discuss the case in more detail," notes CPSA Registrar Dr. Trevor Theman. "If necessary, we work with the physician to improve the quality of their prescribing, focusing on education and training rather than discipline." The TPP also alerts physicians if their patients are seeing more than one physician for the same drug.

In 2013:

- 500,000 unique prescriptions for at least one benzodiazepine were issued in Alberta, similar level for **all** opioid prescriptions combined.
- 206,000 individual patients received at least one benzodiazepine prescription – 6.4% of the total Alberta 16+ population.
- Of patients with prescriptions, 65 per cent were female and 33 per cent were seniors (over the age of 60).

Benzodiazepines will continue to be monitored electronically through the Pharmaceutical Information Network (PIN), with no change to prescribing or dispensing. Unlike other drugs on the TPP list, benzodiazepines will **not** require a triplicate prescription, and prescribers are **not** required to register with the TPP to prescribe them.

In 2016, all codeine-containing products will be added to the TPP list. Codeine-containing drugs include Tylenol 3s and 4s, and will also **not** require a triplicate prescription. The TPP list also includes drugs like Morphine, Oxycodone, Fentanyl and marijuana for medical purposes.

Learn more at: <http://bit.ly/BenzodiazepinesTPP>

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