FACT SHEET

CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL PURPOSES - THE ROLE OF THE LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE IN ALBERTA

KEY WORDS: cannabis for medical purposes, LPN, licensed practical nurse, assistance with administration, marihuana, scope of practice

This FACT SHEET has been developed to inform members about the LPN’s role in assisting clients with the administration of cannabis for medical purposes. This FACT SHEET provides only a snapshot of the information an LPN will need to know about the administration of cannabis and its derivatives if it is part of their practice. Use of cannabis for medical purposes is an evolving phenomenon within health care. The evidence base is still developing and the regulatory framework will likely continue to change over time. For instance, this FACT SHEET refers to cannabis instead of just dried marihuana because new legislation allows clients to access and choose between dried and/or fresh marihuana, cannabis oil, and licensed products that have been altered or derived therefrom; as use is no longer restricted to dried marihuana. As with all aspects of practice, the LPN is responsible for maintaining the profession’s Standard of Practice, abiding by the Code of Ethics and working within the designated Competency Profile for LPNs.

Cannabis is classified as a controlled substance under the federal Controlled Drug and Substances Act (Schedule II).

Although not classified as an approved therapeutic drug in Canada, cannabis may be legally used for medical purposes to help manage the symptoms associated with a variety of disorders and conditions. There is no list of qualifying conditions or symptoms but Health Canada has identified several symptoms or conditions for which it may be used including but not limited to:

- severe refractory nausea and vomiting associated with cancer chemotherapy;
- loss of appetite and body weight in cancer patients and patients with HIV/AIDS;
- pain and muscle spasms associated with multiple sclerosis;
- chronic non-cancer pain;
- severe refractory cancer-associated pain;
- insomnia and depressed moods associated with chronic diseases; and
- symptoms encountered in the palliative/end of life care setting.

What’s Legal?

Step 1: Getting Authorized The Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations (ACMPR) outline the ways Canadians can access and possess cannabis for medical purposes. In order to use cannabis for medical purposes a client must consult with an authorized physician and obtain a signed medical document that allows them to acquire and possess cannabis. An example of the medical document used in Alberta can be found in Appendix 1.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta does not provide a list of physicians who will authorize cannabis for medical purposes. Interested clients are instructed to talk to their family physician for more information.

Step 2: Registering to Purchase/Produce Cannabis The client’s medical document will state the daily quantity of dried marihuana they are able to possess. Once this document is in place, clients may register to purchase their preferred form of cannabis from a licensed producer. For clients using forms of cannabis other than dried marihuana, the equivalent amount of dried marihuana (per gram) should appear on the product label provided by the licensed producer.

Alternatively, under the ACMPR, individuals may register with Health Canada to produce a limited
amount of cannabis themselves or choose to designate another person to do so for them.\(^7\)

Note that Health Canada has stated dispensaries, compassion clubs and other storefronts selling cannabis products continue to remain illegal and as a result may be subject to law enforcement action.\(^7\)

**Route & Dosing Information** Cannabis may be administered through a variety of forms and methods: inhalation of dried marijuana by smoke or vapour, oral ingestion of oils, food, tea or capsules, or topical application.\(^9,10\)

Appropriate and recommended dosing remains individualized and can range between forms and methods of administration. Evidence suggests that the majority of individuals smoking or orally ingesting cannabis use between 1-3 grams of dried cannabis per day.\(^9\)

For more detailed information on available dosing guidelines and typical routes of administration please visit Health Canada’s Information for Health Care Professionals \(\text{(http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhpmzs/marihuana/med/index-eng.php).}\)\(^{11}\)

The LPN should also refer to the general principles of medication administration as applicable in the Competency Profile for LPNs (Section U).\(^3\)

**Adverse Side Effects** Adverse side effects of cannabis derivatives may include but are not limited to: loss of coordination, disorientation, dizziness, low blood pressure, agitation, anxiety, rapid heartbeat, chest pain, feeling faint, psychosis depression, or hallucinations. Health Canada recommends that if any of these side effects occur, therapy should be stopped immediately.\(^9\)

The LPN’s Role in Assisting with the Administration of Cannabis for Medical Purposes While in the presence of a client validly authorized to possess cannabis for medical purposes the LPN may possess (i.e. hold/handle) cannabis for the sole purpose of providing assistance in the administration of cannabis to that client for medical purposes. In this situation, the quantity of cannabis possessed by the LPN must not be more than the daily amount of cannabis the client is allowed to possess.\(^6\) The LPN should not provide assistance if they have concerns about the validity of a client’s authorization.
The LPN must ask the client to confirm their authorization by asking to see their Health-Canada issued registration certificate or a client label/equivalent document issued by a licensed producer. **Diligence in this area is extremely important.** Unauthorized possession of cannabis is prohibited by the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. For a first offence a person found guilty of possession may have to pay a fine up to $1000 and/or be imprisoned for up to six months. For subsequent offences, liability increases to a fine of up to $2000 and/or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year. If a person is found guilty of unauthorized possession of 30 grams or more of cannabis, a person may be imprisoned for a term of 5 years less a day.\(^4\)

Health care facilities have been given the authority to further establish organizational policies for receipt, sale, provision and management of fresh and dried marihuana or cannabis oil within a facility.\(^7\) Organizational policy must be in line with the ACMPR and **the LPN should be aware of any policies that exist in their practice setting**. For example, in some facilities the LPN may require a physician or other prescriber order before helping the client administer cannabis for medical purposes.

All LPNs who may be involved in assisting with the administration of cannabis for medical purposes are encouraged to read the governing legislation, which includes the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, and the Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulation.

If after reading this document you have questions about assisting with the administration of cannabis for medical purposes, please contact a CLPNA Practice Consultant at practice@clpna.com, 780-484-8886 or 1-800-661-5877 (toll free in Alberta).
APPENDIX 1. College of Physicians and Surgeons’ Patient Medical Document – Marihuana for Medical Purposes

Marihuana for Medical Purposes
Patient Medical Document

This document outlines the information an Alberta physician must collect from a patient seeking marihuana for medical purposes.

PATIENT INFORMATION

Surname: ____________________________   Given Name(s): ____________________________
Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY): ____________   Personal Health Number: _________________
Daily quantity of dried marihuana to be used by the patient: _____ g/day
Period of use: ______ day(s) ______ week(s) ______ month(s)
(Note: The period of use cannot exceed one year)
General Comments: ________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

PHYSICIAN INFORMATION

Surname: ____________________________   Given Name(s): ____________________________
Physician’s business address: ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Address at which the physician treated the patient
(if different from above):
______________________________________________________________________________
Phone Number: ____________________________   Fax Number: ____________________________
Email Address: ____________________________
Province(s) Authorized to Practice in: _______________________________________________
Physician Registration Number: ____________________________________________________

By signing this document, I attest that the information contained in this document is correct and complete.

Physician’s Signature: ____________________________
Date Signed (DD/MM/YYYY): ____________________________

FAX FORM (WITHIN 1 WEEK OF COMPLETION)

To: College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta at 780-429-1981
Attention: Physician Prescribing Practices
PUBLISHED SUPPORTIVE DOCUMENTS

This FACT SHEET is linked to other supportive documents:

Practice Statement: Professional Responsibility & Accountability
Fact Sheet: Scope of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses

REFERENCES


Office of Accountability
Office of Administrative Responsibility
Scope and Applicability
Policy Department
Policy Department
This FACT Sheet extends to all LPN and impacts all practice settings where nurses work.

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