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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Attention: Health/General News Editors

Doctors' non-endorsement of prescribing authority attempt to quash new health care reality

Edmonton, AB – The Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) stated today that the Canadian Medical Association's (CMA) refusal to endorse upcoming legislation giving pharmacists prescribing authority is a self-contradictory attempt to quash a new health care reality already underway.

"In theory, physicians may not be supporting pharmacists achieving prescribing authority, but in practice they already are. Collaboration between pharmacists and physicians is already ongoing, especially with the advent of primary care networks," said RxA CEO Barry Cavanaugh.

"In a recent media interview, Dr. T.K. Lee, president of the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), went on record saying that he gets his best medication advice from pharmacists, that pharmacists are the medication experts," added Cavanaugh.

Cavanaugh cited examples of collaborative primary care involving doctors and pharmacists, such as consultations between hospital pharmacists and doctors to prescribe an appropriate drug therapy for a given patient. Another example is when pharmacists with diabetes educator certification assist doctors with the management of diabetes patients' drug therapy.

Pharmacists also serve as watchdogs for prescribing errors made by doctors and resolve them by contacting the prescribing physician, alerting him or her to the error, and adjusting the medication and/or dosage accordingly.

RxA also announced that Alberta pharmacists are ready to embrace the legitimate professional and legal obligations that come with this new responsibility, most of which were already discussed with doctors through their representative groups, the AMA and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA).

"In recent statements to the media, the AMA has implied a lack of awareness of progress and resolution on issues which, quite frankly, has us mystified," said Cavanaugh.

In response to the CMA's suggestion of a conflict of interest between prescribing and dispensing medication, RxA says that the pharmacy profession is a self-regulated health profession bound by strict ethical standards, much like those for physicians. The best interest of the patient is, and always will be, the paramount motivation of the pharmacist, and the pharmacy profession has been zealous in enforcement related to that principle.

"It is less than fair to suggest or imply a likelihood of such an abuse anymore than it would be to suggest a physician would be motivated in a decision about a course of therapy or surgery based on the prospect of increased patient billings," said Cavanaugh.

Regarding maintaining patient records, Alberta pharmacists have already adopted a widespread use of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) which is another effective way for health care

professionals to view the complete picture of a patient's medical and drug history. Doctors stand to benefit greatly from the ease of communication this comprehensive, fact-based record provides and RxA encourages them to use it.

In terms of advising physicians of any prescription changes, RxA says this issue has already been addressed in practice. "Communications and collaboration between the medical and pharmacy professions are vital. This involves emailing and phoning each other when questions arise and taking responsibility for one's actions. This kind of collaboration between doctors and pharmacists is already going on," said Cavanaugh.

The vast majority of RxA member pharmacists has had and will continue to have access to first class malpractice insurance. Most recently, the Alberta College of Pharmacists (ACP) has announced they will make mandatory – as of September 2006 -- individually-held, portable malpractice insurance in a "claims made" policy, at a minimum coverage level of \$2 million.

The regulations change to the Health Professions Act (HPA) giving pharmacists the legal authority to prescribe some medications and administer drugs by injection is expected to take effect this fall.

RxA was launched in 2000 as the professional advocacy body and voice for Alberta pharmacists. Representing more than 2,500 pharmacists throughout the province, RxA's mission is, through leadership and advocacy, to promote and support the value of pharmacists as primary health care providers.

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