

President's Letter

November 9, 2012

Members asked to support NLMA position paper on tobacco cessation

Dear Colleagues:

During a news conference at NLMA headquarters on Thursday, November 8, I was pleased to release the NLMA's *Position Paper on Coverage for NRTs and Tobacco Cessation Medications*. The position paper, which is available on our website, presents a plan on how the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador can potentially subsidize the cost of tobacco cessation therapies for low-income residents as a benefit under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP).

We know that you want us to do more to advocate for our patients and improved health care. That's why we've partnered with a number of health advocacy groups in the province. One issue we continue to be active on is tobacco reduction. A year ago, the NLMA Board of Directors endorsed the Alliance for the Control of Tobacco's *Tobacco Reduction Strategy*, which prompted our latest recommendations.

As it stands, Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick are the only provinces in Canada that do not offer some form of financial assistance for tobacco cessation therapies. That's why the NLMA is recommending that varenicline and bupropion be covered by NLPDP and distributed through pharmacies for smokers who have a prescription from a physician. In addition, the NLMA proposes that smokers who meet the criteria of NLPDP should also receive a free supply of NRT in a method of their choice for up to 12 consecutive weeks in a single calendar year.

The NLMA believes the Smokers' Helpline is an ideal organization to manage the distribution of NRTs to smokers. We propose that once NLPDP approves cessation therapy for a smoker, a Smokers' Helpline CARE Fax Referral will be automatically generated and sent to the Smokers' Helpline. A Smokers' Helpline counselor will then follow up with the individual and provide information on the benefits and limitations of each of the various types of NRT products. The smoker would then receive the NRT in a method of their choice either by mail or at their local pharmacy with proof of enrolment in the program. We propose that government can subsidize the cost of these therapies by increasing provincial tobacco sales tax.

Members who have an interest in tobacco reduction can bolster the NLMA's campaign by promoting the recommendations outlined in our position paper. I encourage all of you to share the paper and supporting materials with your community leaders, your local MHA, your colleagues and other allied health professionals.

You can also help by writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper, by calling talk radio shows like VOXM's *Open Line* or by writing letters to the Minister of Health or other political representatives.

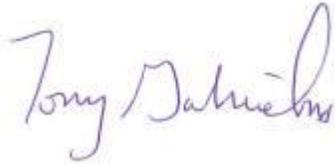
For physicians using social media, we encourage you to help keep momentum on this issue by visiting our Facebook page and sharing the campaign with your contacts. We have also posted video from the news conference to the NLMA's YouTube channel, which you can link to and share on Facebook.

If you're on Twitter, tweet about the position paper or follow the NLMA and retweet – include @susansullivan in your tweets to ensure the Health Minister sees it.

Please visit the NLMA's website at www.nlma.nl.ca for more information or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nlma.nl.ca; on Twitter at www.twitter.com/_nlma and on Youtube at www.youtube.com/nlmavideo.

As long as NRTs and tobacco cessation medications are not available through NLPDP, the retail cost of these therapies will remain prohibitive to people with the lowest incomes and the highest smoking rates. With your help and continued support we can move towards eliminating the barriers to affordable tobacco cessation therapies, while reducing the burden of tobacco-related disease in our province.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Gabriel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "T".

Tony Gabriel, MD, CCFP, FCFP
President