

# President's Letter

November 28, 2017



Lynn Dwyer, MD  
President

## Prescription Monitoring

Dear Colleagues:

The House of Assembly has passed the *Prescription Monitoring Act* and it will become law on January 1, 2018. The Act empowers the Minister of Health and Community Services to operate a monitoring program using the data in the Pharmacy Network. This database includes all drugs dispensed through pharmacies in the province, but initially the focus will be on the use of opioids. The monitoring program can examine the prescribing patterns of physicians, the dispensing patterns of pharmacists, and the drug utilization patterns of individuals. If the program identifies patterns of prescribing, dispensing or utilization that are problematic, referrals could be made to law enforcement officials or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In general terms, the NLMA supports the Prescription Monitoring Program as a necessary measure to identify and reduce the misuse, abuse and diversion of opioids. The devastating impact of growing opioid addiction requires quick and effective responses from government and other stakeholders.

However, the NLMA expressed serious reservations about the inspection powers and several other sections of the new Act. The Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Canadian Medical Association shared similar concerns (see enclosures). The NLMA was also concerned about the lack of meaningful consultation with doctors. We were very disappointed that the Minister did not address any of the NLMA's concerns.

After the Act was passed in the House of Assembly, the NLMA held a meeting with Minister Haggie to seek a commitment on effective consultation during the drafting of the new regulations under the Act. While we have been provided with an assurance in this regard, we will remain vigilant so that the commitment is realized in practice.

### New duties for prescribers

The government plans to administer this program through the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information (NLCHI). There is a large planning and communications effort required to make the program ready by its effective date in January. Doctors should note that the most important new duties for them will be the requirement to consult the *HEALTHe NL* viewer for the medication profile of a patient whenever they prescribe a monitored drug, and to verify on the prescription that the viewer has indeed been checked. These duties will not come into effect for an additional six months to allow sufficient time for doctors to acquire and become proficient in using the viewer. Further communication on this topic will be coming your way. In the meantime, physicians interested in learning more about accessing and using *HEALTHe NL* can contact NLCHI at 709-752-6006, 1-877-752-6006 or [service@nlchi.nl.ca](mailto:service@nlchi.nl.ca) or visit the [NLCHI website](http://nlchi.nl.ca) for more information.



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We expect, in the initial stages of the drug monitoring process, that program administrators will be seeking feedback from individual doctors for explanations about why certain prescribing patterns may exist. It will be important that the program uses strong clinical medical advisors so that the patterns observed in the data can be fully understood. The NLMA will advocate for this expertise to be available. For their own part, doctors should cooperate fully when questions are sent to them from program administrators.

We encourage members to send us comments or concerns about how the Prescription Monitoring Program is unfolding. We will maintain a dialogue with government and NLCHI to ensure your issues are addressed. You can submit your feedback to [president@nlma.nl.ca](mailto:president@nlma.nl.ca).

Best Regards,



Lynn Dwyer, MD  
President

**Enclosures:**

- [NLMA News Release: Doctors fear Prescription Monitoring legislation may have unintended consequences / NLMA Assessment of the Bill to Enact the Prescription Monitoring Act](#)
- [Letter from CMA President Dr. Laurent Marcoux in response to the proposed Prescription Monitoring Act](#)
- [Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner News Release: An Act Respecting the Monitoring of Prescriptions in the Province](#)
- [Proposed Bill 25: An Act Respecting the Monitoring of Prescriptions in the Province](#)