

October 26, 2018

Memo to OAND Members Re. New Cannabis Guidelines

On October 24, CONO Council approved new Guidelines on Non-medical (Recreational) Cannabis. The OAND had been working to ensure that there was flexibility for NDs once cannabis was legalized and although we would like to get more from Health Canada, we are pleased with this.

There are still confusing elements to Canada's new cannabis laws, but this new guidance gives Naturopathic Doctors in Ontario a fair amount of flexibility.

Traditionally if a drug cannot be prescribed by NDs, you are not allowed to talk to patients about it either. With cannabis though, you have some new options. This is in recognition of the fact that post-October 17 it is still a drug which you cannot prescribe, but it is also readily (legally) available to your adult patients.

When it comes to medical cannabis CONO's hands are tied by Federal legislation that still allows only MDs and Nurse Practitioners to prescribe it (formally referred to as "authorizing" rather than prescribing). So, you are not permitted to talk to a patient who is taking medical cannabis about it. The way that I think about that is, if a patient is already under treatment by a MD or NP and have been prescribed cannabis (the only way that they'd have medical cannabis), then you can't counsel these patients on what another practitioner has already prescribed.

If a patient does not have a prescription already and wants to talk to you specifically about medical cannabis, i.e., getting a prescription for it, you should advise them to discuss the use of cannabis for health purposes with their Medical Doctor or Nurse Practitioner.

With respect to recreational cannabis though, the guidance recognizes that patients will use cannabis and that NDs should be able to talk to their patients about this.

As with anything in the regulated health profession world, you must have the knowledge, skill and judgement specific to cannabis in order to offer information to patients. With that you may now provide neutral and unbiased guidance, including general information on the following: the various types and strains of cannabis; potency, amount and frequency; potential risks and benefits; contraindications and considerations with regard to current medications, natural health products and health history.

I am sure readers appreciate that questions will arise about where the dividing line is between "general advice" which you can give, and "specific recommendations" which you cannot. We will work with CONO on developing some illustrative examples to help guide you. For now, trust that if you're recommending that a patient use a certain amount of one type of recreational cannabis for a health benefit, that's too specific and not allowed. If it feels like your giving a prescription, you probably are. If you are providing general information, instead of a recommendation for use, that's OK. Remember though that all patient interactions should be noted in their chart, and this is no exception.

On the point of having sufficient knowledge, skill and judgement about cannabis to advise patients, we're there for you! There is already a Cannabis Panel at the OAND Convention this year (afternoon of November 9) and we're in the process of developing other CE for direct and webinar delivery.

I hope this helps. We'll keep you in touch, but please contact us if you have questions or suggestions.

John Wellner
OAND CEO