



Consumers Can Help Prevent
Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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Preferred Pharmacy Networks Reduce Drug Costs—But at What Cost to You?

If your workplace provides extended health benefits, it's possible you've been asked to use an organized group of pharmacies called a **preferred pharmacy network (PPN)** to fill some of your prescriptions. While you always have a choice about which pharmacy you use, a **PPN** pharmacy can supply medications at lower cost. **PPN** pharmacies usually only provide medications that you take regularly, such as blood pressure medications. In contrast, a **local** pharmacy would provide short-term medications needed right away, like antibiotics. If you are using a PPN as well as a local pharmacy, it's very important to have a complete list of your medications.

Some provinces have central databases that allow all pharmacies to see what medications patients have received. In other provinces or territories, there is no such database. If you get medications from more than one pharmacy and a central database does not exist, neither pharmacy will know about the medications you receive from the other one. This means the pharmacist can't check to make sure a medication is right for you or to look for dangerous drug interactions. Missing these types of checks could result in serious side effects.

SafeMedicationUse.ca received a report about a patient who received their medications from a PPN pharmacy. The pharmacy happened to be in another province from where the person lived. As a result, the local pharmacy didn't have a complete list of all medications the person was taking, making it difficult to check that any newly prescribed medications were safe to take.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following tips if you get your medications from a PPN:

- Always keep an updated list of all your medications. Share this list with pharmacies that fill prescriptions for you.
- Tell your local pharmacy that you also receive medications through a PPN pharmacy.
- Use a refill reminder on your phone or on a calendar to keep track of your medications and refill dates. Schedule your refill deliveries to arrive the week before you will run out.
- Contact your PPN to learn if any local pharmacies are part of the PPN. Using the same pharmacy for all your prescription needs is ideal.

This newsletter was developed in collaboration with Best Medicines Coalition and Patients for Patient Safety Canada.

Recommendations are shared with healthcare providers, through the ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin, so that changes can be made together. This newsletter shares information about safe medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation.

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