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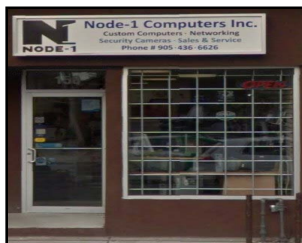
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Ensuring Patient-Safety of Cannabis Now More Important Than Ever

The Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) applauds the Ontario government on its initiative to consult with Ontarians towards the creation of a new retail model for the sale and distribution of recreational cannabis. Since pharmacists are the medication experts on a patient's healthcare team, OPA welcomes this approach as an opportunity to advise the government during its period of consultation specifically on the sale and distribution of medicinal cannabis, and how patient safety and appropriate use can be assured and monitored in Ontario.

With recreational cannabis being the sole focus of the government announcement, OPA remains concerned on the process by which medicinal cannabis is currently dispensed in Ontario and on the lack of medication safety measures that need to be in place to ensure patient safety and appropriate use. During the period of consultation, OPA will be urging the government to reconsider its current approach for the sale and distribution of medicinal cannabis and enable it to be dispensed through pharmacies, while using the existing pharmacy supply management systems, where patients are able to receive the care, advice and education they need and want. In a recent poll of approximately 600 pharmacy professionals, nearly 60% indicated that their patients are currently using cannabis for medicinal purposes, and 40% said they receive questions from patients at least once a month about cannabis. In an earlier survey of 800 adults, seven out of ten Ontarians said patients should be able to obtain cannabis for medical purposes from their pharmacist – like they do with all prescription products – so that they have increased access to the advice, guidance and information they need and want.

Pharmacists have access to a patient's full medication history, know their allergies and serve as a patient's last line of defence against harmful drug-drug interactions – licensed producers do not

have this access or knowledge of a patient's medication profile.

"We're pleased to see that the government is creating opportunities for discussion about medicinal cannabis. We've been asking for this for some time. It's critical that medicinal cannabis is dispensed through pharmacies. Medicinal cannabis is the only medication that requires a prescription that is not dispensed through pharmacies, and this is a potential safety risk and a missed healthcare opportunity," says Mike Cavanagh, Chair, OPA Board of Directors.

Currently, an Ontario patient must obtain cannabis for medical purposes through a federally licensed producer via mail order pursuant to a prescription issued by a prescriber. Furthermore, with Ontario in the midst of an opioid crisis that shows no signs of abating, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that cannabis for medicinal purposes can be a suitable alternative to opioid therapy in the management of pain. This underscores the incredible importance of capturing the dispensing of all prescription drugs on the patient's medication profile in the pharmacy. The province has the legislative power to make cannabis for medicinal purposes available to patients through their pharmacist.

"This in the best interests of Ontarians' continued health and safety, and it is also what Ontarians want," says Cavanagh.

As the medication experts on a patient's healthcare team, pharmacy professionals play a critical role in managing a patient's overall health. Ontario's pharmacists are driven by their commitment to provide patient-centred care in local communities across the province, and as a result should be the primary point of contact for the controlled dispensing of medicinal cannabis in the province. OPA looks forward to working with the Ontario government and other healthcare providers on ensuring that medicinal cannabis is introduced in our province in a safe and effective manner.

About the Ontario Pharmacists Association
 The Ontario Pharmacists Association is committed to evolving the pharmacy profession and advocating for excellence in practice and patient care. With more than 10,000 members, OPA is Canada's largest advocacy organization, and professional development and drug information provider for pharmacy professionals across Ontario. By leveraging the unique expertise of pharmacy professionals, enabling them to practise to their fullest potential, and making them more accessible to patients, OPA is working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the healthcare system. The pharmacy sector plays a strong role in Ontario with an economic impact of more than \$6.3 billion across 4,500 pharmacies, employing 60,000 Ontarians.