Panel reviewing cancer drug error presents report to Ontario government

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has received the report of the independent panel that reviewed quality assurance in the province's cancer-drug supply chain—following the distribution of diluted chemotherapy drugs to hospitals in Ontario and New Brunswick.

In early April 2013, the province called on Jake Thiessen, the founding director of the University of Waterloo's School of Pharmacy, to lead the review. His mandate was to determine how the chemotherapy underdosing occurred and to recommend ways to prevent reoccurrences.

Dr. Thiessen delivered his report to the Ministry on July 12. His work was supported by a working group that included the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP), the Ontario Hospital Association, Cancer Care Ontario, the New Brunswick government, Health Canada and representatives from the affected hospitals—4 in Ontario and 1 in New Brunswick.

The government promised to release Dr. Thiessen's report to the public after it was reviewed. At the time of *CPJ*'s publication, the province was planning that release for the end of July.

On May 27, Dr. Thiessen testified on some early findings of his inquiry before a committee of the Ontario legislature. He told the committee that he had found no evidence that Marchese Hospital Solutions, the company that prepared the cancer-drug solutions, had been attempting to cut corners.

"There is no evidence of any malicious or deliberate drug-sparing dilution in preparing the bags of cyclophosphamide or gemcitabine," he testified.

Meanwhile, the Ontario government did not wait for Dr. Thiessen's report before taking action to improve oversight over the supply of cancer drugs.

On May 15, the province announced it was bringing in new regulations in 2 key areas. It granted authority to the OCP to inspect premises where a pharmacist or pharmacy technician engages in or supervises drug preparation activities. It also changed regulations to require Ontario hospitals to purchase drugs only from accredited, licensed or otherwise approved suppliers.

DOI: 10.1177/1715163513501784

Manitoba pharmacists scheduled to complete vote by late July on regulations for 2006 Pharmaceutical Act

Manitoba pharmacists were to finish voting by late July 2013 on regulations implementing an expanded scope of practice that was almost 7 years in the making.

The province was one of the first in Canada to pass enabling legislation for pharmacist authority in such areas as independent prescribing, immunization and ordering lab tests. However, approving final regulations for the *Pharmaceutical Act* of December 2006 has proved to be a lengthy process—in part because Manitoba is unique in requiring a majority of licensed pharmacists to approve the regulatory changes in a vote.

Pharmacists rejected the first version of the draft regulations in 2008 and then approved the next version in 2010. In the process of further developing the regulations in concert with the provincial government, enough changes were made to warrant yet another vote by the membership.

For this latest vote, pharmacists had until July 29 to return their ballots to the Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association (MPhA).

"After 7 years of work, passing these regulations is an important first step in showing the government, the public and ourselves that we are ready to step into the 21st century of pharmacy

practice,” said MPhA president Kyle MacNair in a written message to members on July 19.

The Manitoba Society of Pharmacists (MSP) also supported the regulations. Speaking to *CPJ* before the voting was complete, the Executive Director of the MSP, Brenna Shearer, expressed a degree of optimism about the results.

“Our board of directors have been actively engaged with the MPhA to help develop the regulations,” said Dr. Shearer. “Because of our involvement we feel very confident that the regulations put us in a better place to move forward. And the MPhA has worked hard to ensure everyone has been consulted and that information is shared, so if there are any concerns or issues they would have been dealt with along the way.”

Having the regulations in place would strengthen the MSP’s efforts to negotiate a compensation framework with the province, she said. “In Manitoba, we are one of the only provinces that doesn’t have a framework and we

have taken it on as a major mission to change that.”

The MSP has begun preliminary discussions with Manitoba Health about reimbursement for professional services.

“Regulations don’t address compensation,” adds the executive director. “But if you don’t have a scope of practice defined you have nothing by which to work for reimbursement.”

Before the vote, pharmacists in Manitoba already had medication reviews and continuing care prescriptions within their scope of practice. “However, there is no compensation for those professional services so we could, at minimum, be working on compensation for those pieces,” Dr. Shearer said. “But the regulations will enable us to deal with a much larger basket of services and to be consistent with other jurisdictions in the country.”

DOI: 10.1177/1715163513501633

“The MPhA has worked hard to ensure everyone has been consulted and that information is shared”

—Brenna Shearer,
Executive Director,
Manitoba Society of
Pharmacists