Ontario Patch-for-Patch Fentanyl Return Program: 6-month review of patient returns and opinions

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IN OCTOBER 2016, THE PATCH-FOR-PATCH FENTANYL RETURN Program came into effect in Ontario. This new policy stated that patients must return all of their used fentanyl patches to the pharmacy before being able to get their next refill.¹ Failure to return all of the patches would result in the patient not receiving all the patches from his or her next refill.² In this instance, the physician would be informed of the occurrence and a decision would be made whether or not the remaining patches could be dispensed.¹

Informing current patients of the new program resulted in a wide variety of opinions. Those who were opposed to the idea stated that it was going to be very difficult to return the used patches to the pharmacy, due to various factors, such as forgetfulness or because they just did not want to. However, along with the hostility came a lot of understanding, with many patients having a positive attitude towards the potential decrease in abuse, misuse and diversion from fentanyl.^{1,2}

Fast forward approximately 6 months after the program was begun, and here is a snapshot of what our pharmacy in Thunder Bay, Ontario, has observed in terms of patient returns. All

patients have been returning their used patches when they want their next refill, with many ready to return them before they are even asked for them. We developed a tracking form for use with the program (Appendix 1, available in the online version of the article). Throughout the course of the first 6 months, there was only 1 instance where the physician had to be notified because the patient did not return all of the patches. The physician was aware of the situation, as the patient had taken the initiative to speak to the physician beforehand.

There have been reports from other pharmacies, however, of patients attempting to divert and not return all of their patches,³ sometimes even returning nicotine patches or just tape with a logo on it, and claiming that they were indeed fentanyl patches.³

In our pharmacy, though, not only are compliant patients ensuring that they are returning all of their patches, but many patients who did not see the benefit of the program have changed their view. They now see the importance of returning their patches and understand it is not for the physician or pharmacist to spy on them but to protect the public from their used patches. ■

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References

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