

## **Nova Scotia Law Amendments Submission Regarding Bill 17**

May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Good Afternoon Mr. Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Jennifer Ramsay.

I am a pharmacist and the owner of Rockingham Pharmasave in Clayton Park and Community Pharmasave in Hatchet Lake. I am here today to request that Bill 17 not become law in its current form.

Before Bill 17 is passed, the government needs to address how pharmacists will be reimbursed for their services. A new comprehensive tariff agreement should be in place that fairly compensates pharmacists for their services and addresses their expanding role in the health care system. A comprehensive funding program will allow pharmacies to continue to operate and provide services to patients across Nova Scotia. We need to know **BEFORE** this Bill is passed how we will be reimbursed so that we will be able to continue to operate in a financially stable environment.

The implications of passing Bill 17 in its current form will have grave consequences for pharmacies across NS. The Bill will result in a great deal of uncertainty for pharmacists and their patients. Specifically, pharmacy owners across Nova Scotia will be forced to reduce hours, lay off staff members including both pharmacy and non-pharmacy related employees. In some cases pharmacies will be forced to close their doors.

In Hatchet Lake, my husband and I have just finished building a new pharmacy and medical clinic that serves this area. The positive feedback from members of the community has been enormous. By building this new facility we have provided a group of five rural doctors with a facility where they can effectively practice medicine and provide a large community with essential health care services. The pharmacy itself is a tremendous asset to this community. Seniors and families rely on the pharmacists here to provide invaluable advice and information about their medications and medical conditions. The financial investment for my husband and I to build a facility like this has been enormous. We made this investment based on Nova Scotia's existing reimbursement model. It is imperative for the viability of this business and many others across Nova Scotia that a new funding model for generic drugs is fair and well thought out. The new funding model should not destroy the possibility for us to maintain a sustainable business in this province. We trust that the government of Nova Scotia sees the value in the investments pharmacists like myself have made and will do as much as possible to support us by establishing a FAIR generic drug pricing strategy. A strategy that is well thought out and not rushed. A strategy that will not jeopardize pharmacies across Nova Scotia.

This leads to my next area of concern... **Pharmacy services.**

Pharmacists provide Nova Scotians with a great number of health related services. Pharmacists are one the most accessible, relied upon health care professionals in our health care system. We are always there to counsel patients on their medications and medical conditions. We are there to answer the phone and help a mother decide which medication is the best choice to treat her child's high fever. We have always been there for seniors and families. We are accessible and Nova Scotians rely on us to be available to them, morning,

midday or late at night. Because pharmacies will be forced to layoff staff, pharmacist hours and technician hours will be reduced. This will result in less opportunity for pharmacists to speak with and spend time with their patients. Imagine having to make an appointment to speak with your pharmacist when you need to ask a time sensitive question about a missed dose of medication. How many other health care professionals can you call who will actually pick up the phone and address your health care concern immediately without asking you to take a number or make an appointment? Pharmacists want to continue to be there for their patients.

There are so many other pharmacy related services that will also be jeopardized - home delivery of prescriptions (a service that many pharmacies often offer seniors for no cost), compliance packaging for seniors who are unable to remember to take their medications or find it too confusing to do so, smoking cessation clinics, blood pressure monitoring, refill reminder programs to name a few.

To date, pharmacies have relied on rebates from generic manufacturers to compensate them for these services because dispensing fees from the government have not been adequate to cover expenses like wages and other business related costs. As a pharmacy owner I now have to ask myself how will I cover these costs if there is no funding put in place to bridge this gap? Will pharmacies across Nova Scotia survive? Some will not and some will struggle. We need to discuss how pharmacies will be compensated **before** these cuts are made.

As an independent pharmacy owner I can tell you our business is pharmacy. We provide pharmacy services to our patients, we counsel patients, we take care of our patients during and after regular hours. We donate to local church groups; donate to hockey teams and the schools in our communities. We live in and love our communities. We always have invested in our communities and hope to continue to do so. This Bill jeopardizes all of these things.

If this Bill becomes law it is scheduled to go into effect July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. This does not leave sufficient time for government and pharmacists to come up with a comprehensive funding program through a new tariff agreement and fee schedule for expanded pharmacy services. It is imperative that this committee realize the importance of delaying Bill 17 in order to restore stability to pharmacy practice in Nova Scotia and ensure that health care of Nova Scotians is not negatively impacted. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Your attention on this matter is greatly appreciated.

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