

## YOU'VE ASKED

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### *As a registered nurse (RN), do I have the authority to suggest or administer "over the counter" medications without a prescription?*

THE ANSWER IS YES. BASED ON THE employer policy, the registered nurse's judgement and competence, and in specific situations, such as at a children's camp, a registered nurse may suggest or administer OTC medications, provided they are in their original container. Because of the complexity of client care and of the involvement of many health care providers, most settings (i.e., hospitals, nursing homes, community nursing, extra-mural program) have policies in place requiring RNs to have a prescription from an authorized prescriber before administering or recommending OTC medications.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications refer to medications that can be obtained without a prescription from an authorized prescriber. Over-the-counter medications (OTC) can be purchased, without a prescription, in local pharmacies and other retail outlets.

To determine if a certain medication is an OTC medication (medications that are listed within schedule II, III or in the unscheduled section of NAPRA), consult the following link: [www.napra.ca/pages/Schedules/Search.aspx](http://www.napra.ca/pages/Schedules/Search.aspx).

Whether the medication is prescribed or an OTC medication, the administration is only one component of a continuous process that goes beyond the task of giving a medication to a client. The Nurses Association of New Brunswick's *Medication Administration: Practice Standard* document indicates that the RNs must apply their knowledge about the client and the medication when assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating the medication administration process, which includes

the recommendation or administration of OTC medications. When recommending or administering OTC medications, RNs must:

- have an employer policy supporting the suggestion or administration of OTC medications;
- review the client's lifestyle/routine to identify and eliminate (if possible) any potential barriers or challenges that may exist for adherence to the medication regimen;
- assess the client's condition before recommending or administering the medication;
- be knowledgeable about the actions of the specified medication, and possible interactions with a client's current medications and diet;
- have the necessary skills and judgment required to administer the OTC medication competently, safely and ethically;
- prepare and administer OTC medications according to evidence-based rationale and practice setting policies;
- verify: the right client, the right drug, the right dosage, the right time, the right route, and the right documentation;
- explain the therapeutic effects and potential risks and side effects of the medication to the client;

- document actions or advice given and client outcomes according to documentation standards and practice setting policies;
- recognize client outcomes following medication administration including effectiveness, side effects, and signs of drug interactions;
- refer clients to the appropriate care provider for further assessment and follow-up when necessary (for example, when the underlying problem persists and the medication has no effect).

For more information on medication administration, please review NANB's document: *Medication Administration: Practice Standard* at [www.nanb.nb.ca/downloads/Med Standard Revised October 2013.pdf](http://www.nanb.nb.ca/downloads/Med%20Standard%20Revised%20October%202013.pdf) or contact NANB's Practice Department at 1-800-442-4417 or by email at [nanb@nanb.nb.ca](mailto:nanb@nanb.nb.ca).

## REFERENCES

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National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities-schedules retrieved October 2014 <http://napra.ca/pages/Schedules/Overview.aspx?id=1925>

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2010). *Documentation: Practice Standard*. Fredericton: Author.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick (2013). *Medication Administration: Practice Standard*. Fredericton: Author.