

Root of the Matter: Naloxone Update

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In the November 2016 edition of *Access*, the College shared information on amendments to the *Health Professions Act (HPA)*. The changes allow for all health professionals regulated by the HPA, including dental hygienists, to administer naloxone in an emergency situation, to a person they suspect is suffering from an opioid overdose. At that time there was little information available on how to access education and where to purchase naloxone kits. The following is meant to provide further follow-up to this initial information.

Opioid overdose has become an important public health issue especially over the past 2-years. The BC Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) shared data from the BC Corners Service showing that in 2016, 659 people died in BC from illicit fentanyl. As of October 31, 2017, the number of deaths related to fentanyl overdose was at 999. This surpasses the mortality rates related to fentanyl overdose for 2015 and 2016 combined.¹

Naloxone is a fast-acting drug that can be administered, via an intramuscular injection or intranasal spray, to temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. As the effects only last between 20 to 90 minutes, the overdose may return.² As such, a second or third dose of naloxone may be required. When an opioid overdose is suspected, always activate Emergency Medical Services (EMS) prior to responding to the overdose.³

Up until early 2016 naloxone was regulated as a Schedule 1 drug and was not available to the public without a prescription. Due to the increased need for access to naloxone, in order to save lives, regulation was amended. A brief history of the changes to naloxone regulations is as follows:^{2,4}

- March of 2016, Health Canada removed naloxone hydrochloride from the Prescription Drug List and was made available as a Schedule II drug in BC
- September 2016, naloxone became an Unscheduled drug in BC
- October 2016, Health Canada approved the sale of intranasal naloxone in Canada

We often receive questions at the College from registrants asking if they are required to obtain naloxone kits and receive training in naloxone administration. There is no requirement mandating that a dental hygienist must obtain a naloxone kit and naloxone training. However, if working with a population that is at a higher risk for opioid overdoses, you may choose to have a naloxone kit on-site in your dental hygiene practice setting. As a dental hygiene professional, you must ensure that you are properly trained prior to administering naloxone and have education related to recognizing an opioid overdose. This would include remaining current with basic life support (BSL) and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). BSL and CPR, along with naloxone training, are required when managing a suspected opioid overdose.

The BC CDC, has developed a resource that provides a [Decision Support Tool](#) for the administration of naloxone.⁵ While the target audience for this resource was intended for registered nurses, it has valuable information for dental hygienists to review. As such, we recommend this tool be kept on hand as a quick resource for periodically refreshing one's knowledge once naloxone training has been completed. We suggest that a 1-page educational resource be posted near or in the naloxone kit in the

dental hygiene practice setting. BC Pharmacists in conjunction with the BCCDC have developed such a resource for both ampoule and vial naloxone administration and are titled “[Naloxone Brochure Ampoule](#)” and “[Naloxone Brochure Vial](#)”.

There are several avenues for obtaining naloxone education. Local Health Authorities and local providers of first aid often provide training. [Toward the Heart](#) provides a number of resources and information on training including the [Quick-Learn Lesson: Naloxone Administration](#). The [Toward the Heart](#) website provides a list of [pharmacies across BC](#) that sell naloxone kits as well as pharmacies that provide training.⁵ As supplies may not always be available, it is recommended to contact the pharmacy to check on naloxone stock prior to making the trip to purchase the supplies.

As of August 2017, Narcan®, the intranasal naloxone spray, is only available through [ADAPT Pharma Canada](#). Like naloxone, this does not require a prescription for purchase. The cost is approximately \$125-\$145.00 for one carton which contains two- single unit doses. This is, in contrast to, an approximated cost of \$5.00-\$20.00 of naloxone per dose or ampule.⁴ Pre-assembled naloxone kits may range between \$30-\$70.00.⁴

Dental hygienists in BC are not required to complete naloxone training. However, it is appropriate to be prepared to recognize the signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose and respond accordingly if ever in a situation where a suspected opioid overdose occurs. In a small way this allows dental hygienists to be engaged in harm reduction strategies. The BC CDC defines harm reduction as follows:⁷

“Harm reduction aims to keep people safe and minimize death, disease and injury from high-risk behavior.”

References

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