

## Professional Notice

**To:** PHARMACY PRACTITIONERS

**From:** The Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists

**Date:** April 25, 2019

**Re:** UPDATE: CLARIFICATION OF THE SIGNATURE REQUIREMENTS FOR A VALID PRESCRIPTION

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Increasingly, electronic medical record (EMR) software systems are being used by prescribers in Nova Scotia to generate prescriptions. The prescriptions are either printed on paper and given to patients or transmitted directly to pharmacies via fax. Signatures are added to these prescriptions using various processes including a dynamic digital signature (i.e. with a stylus) or a static embedded signature. Regardless of the method used, a pharmacist must be satisfied that the prescription is authentic and is the one and only valid copy.

Amendments have been made to the [\*Pharmacy Practice Policy: Clarification of the Current Signature Criteria for a Valid Prescription\*](#) to provide clarity to pharmacy practitioners, prescribers, and other stakeholders about the requirements necessary for the signature on a prescription to be considered valid.

This includes:

- Clarification that if a prescription is **printed and given to a patient to take to a pharmacy to be filled**, it must contain an original signature (**i.e. pen on paper**). Signatures created electronically are not considered valid as a pharmacist cannot differentiate them from that of a high-quality photocopy, thereby increasing the risk of diversion.
- Clarification that prescriptions generated by the physician's EMR and **transmitted directly to a pharmacy (including by fax)** must contain a signature that is consistent with Health Canada's definition of sign<sup>1</sup> in the context of electronically transmitted prescriptions.

Pharmacists are responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that a signature on a prescription is authentic and that a prescription is the one and only copy. While it is reasonable to expect that prescribers will only use electronic prescribing systems that ensure the authenticity of the prescriber as a requirement for the generation of the prescription, further steps to ensure authenticity and originality may be necessary in various circumstances. This includes when the prescriber and/or patient are unknown to the pharmacy, or when aspects of the prescription raises concern.

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<sup>1</sup> Sign: whatever is determined to be necessary to authenticate and validate the order in that pharmacists must have a high degree of certainty that the identified practitioner (in the electronic message) has ordered the prescription