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Clinical Assistant: Prescribing Authority

Clinical Assistants

Effective immediately, Clinical Assistants can issue prescriptions under the delegated authority of a medical practitioner. The Clinical Assistant (CA) practice is relatively new to Manitoba. The regulation to the Medical Act was approved in 1999 and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) hired the first CA in early 2002. Manitoba is the first Province in Canada to pass regulations permitting the practice of Clinical Assistants; several other provinces are now considering similar regulations. Clinical Assistants are healthcare providers who practice medicine under direct physician supervision. A Clinical Assistant is a “physician extender”, who augments a physician's practice.

Clinical Assistants are dependant practitioners who practice medicine autonomously, but not independently. This physician-CA supervisory relationship is mandated through regulations, and is the principle on which the profession is founded. Currently there are approximately 15 CA's practicing in a variety of medical and surgical specialties throughout the WRHA. Some Clinical Assistants working for the WRHA are using the term Physician's Assistant.

The CAs will help improve access to health care services, assist in waiting time reduction, provide both acute and chronic disease management, and enhance the collaborative practice provided by their physician-CA team and other healthcare professionals. In Manitoba, there are two categories of Clinical Assistants, Certified & Non-certified.

Certified Clinical Assistants abbreviated “CA (cert.)” are individuals who have successfully completed an accredited Physician Assistant (PA) training program in either the U.S. or Canada. They must have also passed the national credentialing exam for the country in which they trained. There is currently only one PA training program in Canada operated by the Canadian Armed Forces, and is based out of CFB Borden Ontario. The Canadian military has utilized PA's for several decades to support healthcare services needed for military personnel both at home and while on deployment in foreign countries. Currently two civilian PA training programs are being developed and awaiting final funding approval, the University of Manitoba Medical School and the Justice Institute of British Columbia.

Both programs are working towards a September 2007 enrolment.

Physician Assistant training programs are 27-36 months in duration, and are based on a medical model similar to physician training. The breadth of learned medical knowledge is similar, but the depth of PA education is less comprehensive than that for a physician. A majority of PA training programs are part of the Faculty of Medicine at their respective universities. Entry requirements include prior healthcare education training and experience, such as a Registered Nurse or Paramedic.

Non-Certified Clinical Assistants (abbreviated “CA”) are individuals whose credentials have been verified and applications approved by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Manitoba (CPSM). They must then pass the Registered Clinical Assistant (RCA) Part I exam administered by the University of Manitoba. Applicants for registration as a Non-Certified CA must meet the following requirements:

- a) *have a degree in medicine from a faculty of medicine acceptable to the council (CPSM);*
- b) *be licensed or registered to provide healthcare under an act of legislature; or*
- c) *be certified as an Emergency Medical Attendant-level III (EMA III).*

After orientation and training within a specific area of practice, the Non-Certified CA must complete the RCA Part II exam. The University of Manitoba office of Continuing Medical Education also administers this exam.

Legislation

Clinical Assistants are registered pursuant to the Clinical Assistant Regulation (Regulation 183/99) of The Medical Act (C.C.S.M.c.M90). This permits registration of Clinical Assistants on Part 2 of the Clinical Assistant Register. The CA must enter into a **contract of supervision** with a licensed physician(s), and a list of alternate supervising physicians must also be submitted and approved. In conjunction with the contract of supervision, the physician must submit a **detailed practice description** outlining the CA's duties and functions. These practice descriptions must be approved by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Manitoba (CPSM) prior to the CA entering into clinical practice.

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Clinical Assistants . . . *continued* . . .

Information on the Prescription and DPIN Data Entry

The authority to issue a prescription is outlined in section 16(1-3) of the Clinical Assistant Regulation. Clinical Assistants **cannot prescribe narcotics or controlled substances**. The **Federal Controlled Drug & Substances Act** restricts this authority to prescribe these products to physicians, dentists, and veterinary practitioners.

The prescriptions from Clinical Assistants must include all the usual prescribing information plus the:

- **name and signature of the CA followed by the designation “CA(Cert.)” or “CA”**
- **contact telephone number for the CA,**
- **name of the Supervising Physician,**
- **treatment goal and/or diagnosis and/or clinical indication.**

Prescriptions are entered into the Drug Programs Information Network (DPIN) using the name and authority of the Supervising Physician, as indicated on the prescription form.

Included with this newsletter is the current list of Clinical Assistants approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba.

Scope of Practice

The Clinical Assistant's (CA) scope of practice must mirror that of the supervising physician. The CA effectively extends the same services to clients as does the physician. The CA may not provide services for any physician that is not listed in the contract of supervision, or that are outside of the supervising physician's scope of practice. Each supervising physician must submit a detailed practice description outlining the duties & functions of the CA in relation to the physician's practice. This practice description must be approved by CPSM.

Clinical Assistant & Pharmacist Collaboration

As with anyone employed in a healthcare field, collaboration & cooperation between all healthcare professionals is essential. The clinical assistant prescriber-pharmacist collaboration is crucial to ensure that both patient safety & quality outcomes in disease management / prevention are met. The inclusion of **“the treatment goal and/or diagnosis and/or clinical indication”** on the prescription is critical for patient care and safety and successful implementation of treatment plans.