

# Fact Sheet

## What is a PSW's Role in Medication?

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The rules for a PSW assisting and monitoring medication use for their clients are often misunderstood. Here are a few guidelines to help clear this up.

Types of Assistance a PSW may give:

- ✓ Reminding client to take medication when the client is physically able to do so
- ✓ Providing some help with physical tasks, such as helping the client to open a bottle or blister pack, when asked by the client
- ✓ Handing the client the contents of a dosette or individual-dose blister pack at the proper time, when asked by the client
- ✓ Opening the medication bottle, pouring out the proper amount of medication, and giving the medication to the client at their request

There are 4 factors that determine if and how a PSW can assist a client in medication:

1. Legislation (The "Law")
2. Work Setting (The "Location" of Work)
3. Employer Policy ("Local Procedures")
4. The Worker's Ethics, Training and Competencies ("Liability")

### *1. Legislation:*

There is no law in Ontario that prohibits a PSW from administering a medication as part of her job, unless:

- S/He is working in a long term care home that falls under Ontario's Long Term Care Homes Act, or a facility governed by one of Ontario's hospital acts.
- The medication is
  - ✓ Injected
  - ✓ Inserted
  - ✓ Inhaled

Other than in the settings described in the previous paragraph, the law does not prohibit any person from administering/assisting another with administration of:

- ✓ Oral pills/liquids
- ✓ Lotions and topical medications
- ✓ Eye drops
- ✓ Ear drops
- ✓ Nose drops
- ✓ Transdermal patches

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Exempted Acts under the *Regulated Health Professions Act*:

Administration of a substance by injection or inhalation or by insertion into an opening of the body is a controlled act in Ontario. This means that these acts must be performed by a member of the regulated health profession permitted to perform the act. However, under certain conditions, these acts may be performed by someone not a member of the designated health profession. In these cases, a PSW can administer medication that is injected, inserted or inhaled if:

- ✓ The act is routine for the person
- ✓ The client's condition is stable
- ✓ The expected outcomes of the administration are known
- ✓ They have been taught the procedure with the client by a member of the health profession permitted to perform the act, or the client.

In such cases, the PSW must have the agency's permission *before performing the act* and the PSW cannot transfer the skill to another client without training with the new client.

## 2. Employer Policies:

Employers can and usually do set policies that limit a PSW's ability to administer medications. This may be a part of a contract the employer has with a third party. PSWs have an obligation to work within the agency's policy, even if the acts are legal or otherwise permitted activities. Permitted activities may vary from client to client or program to program.

## 3. Work setting:

As stated under Section 1, Legislation, PSWs cannot administer medications in long term care homes that fall under Ontario's Long Term Care Homes Act, or a facility governed by one of Ontario's hospital acts. Occasionally, a Registered Nurse or Registered Practical Nurse may delegate the application of applying topical medications (e.g. medicated lotions or ointments) to a PSW on a one time basis. Such delegation is legal, but must only be done in situations in which the delegation clearly benefits the client and does not pose undue risk. In such a case, the liability is with the member of the health profession permitted by the Regulated Health Professions Act, or the employer's policy, to perform the act, and not with the PSW to whom the act was delegated.

## 4. Ethics, Training and Competencies:

Even if a PSW is permitted by legislation and the employer to administer medication, the PSW must make certain that s/he has been taught the correct method and has had time to practice and gain skill and comfort. *No act is safe if you have not been trained, or do not have the required competencies, to do it!*

Ethics is a set of principles of right conduct. The principles that come most into play when a PSW is administering medications are:

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1. Client Safety (“First, do no harm”). Do no harm to clients by commission or omission. Medications can be harmful, and at times even fatal. Do not administer medication that you are not sure about, even if the client urges you to do so. Sometimes not taking medication can be harmful and even fatal. If there is no alternative, you may have to act to assist the client. Only take on responsibilities that through demonstrated competence, you are able to conduct safely. Recognize the risk to clients in whatever you do.
2. High Quality Care. Defer to best practices at all times. If you don’t know best practice, seek supervision, training, guidance or assistance before acting. Defer to the best person for the job. If you are not the only person available to help in the administration of medication, ensure that the most qualified person administers the medication (unless you are being trained). If there is nobody else available, get whatever help you can find to ensure the best interest of the client is looked after in the best way possible.

When administering or assisting the PSW must know:

- ✓ Any relevant information about the client, including allergies/health concerns that may be affected by the medication and what the PSW should look out for
- ✓ Other medications the client is taking – when are they taken, do any of these medications affect the medication they are about to be given and observe for that
- ✓ Foods/beverages that may affect the drug or cause side effects
- ✓ The reason the client is taking the drug
- ✓ The effects that should happen and what action to take if the expected result does not appear.
- ✓ What side effects may arise and what to do if they do arise
- ✓ The time the drug is to be administered, the correct dosage and the method to be used to administer the medication
- ✓ What to do if the client refuses the medication or skips a dosage
- ✓ The person to contact if any problems arise
- ✓ The records to be kept and the procedure to be used for recording.

PSWs should NEVER:

- Offer advice about taking or not taking a drug
- Share information about their personal medications
- Administer a medication when they are not authorized
- Fail to advise the appropriate person of concerns they have about a client’s medication use.

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[www.psno.ca](http://www.psno.ca)

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