

Fact Sheet

What is a PSW's Role in Medication?

The rules for a PSW monitoring and assisting their clients with medication are often misunderstood. This Fact Sheet provides information to help clarify the PSW role in medication administration.

As we'll discuss below, the setting will determine the extent of the PSW role. However, as a PSW, you should have been taught to do the following:

- ✓ Remind client to take medication when the client is physically able to do so
- ✓ Provide some help with physical tasks, such as helping the client to open a bottle or blister pack, when asked by the client
- ✓ Hand the client the contents of a dosette or individual-dose blister pack at the proper time, when asked by the client
- ✓ Apply topical medications, transdermal patches, administering eye, ear and nose drops
- ✓ Open a medication bottle, pour out the proper amount of liquid or oral pill medication, and give the medication to the client at their request or as instructed in the support plan.

There are 4 factors that determine if and how a PSW can assist a client in medication. We call these the "Four L's of Medication Assistance"

1. *Legislation*
2. *Location of Work* (community, LTC home, hospital, etc.)
3. *Local Employer Policy* (what the PSW's employer permits you to do)
4. *Liability* (The PSW's training, competencies and ethics)

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

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Other than in the settings just described, 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

Excepted Acts under the *Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA)*:

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 a regulated health profession permitted to perform the act, unless certain conditions apply.

The RHPA states that certain acts may be performed by another, if the act is routine for the person. (*RHPA, Section 29 (1) (e)*). The acts the RHPA permits a PSW to do are:

- Administering a substance by injection or inhalation.
- Putting an instrument, hand or finger,
 - i. beyond the external ear canal,
 - ii. beyond the point in the nasal passages where they normally narrow,
 - iii. beyond the larynx,
 - iv. beyond the opening of the urethra,
 - v. beyond the labia majora,
 - vi. beyond the anal verge, or
 - vii. into an artificial opening into the body.

The most common acts are those done by injection, insertion or inhalation. We call these the "Three I's."

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Routine Acts

The RHPA states that the above acts may be legally performed by a PSW if the act is routine. RHPA does not define routine, but it is generally accepted that the following are key factors:

- ✓ The client's condition is stable
- ✓ The act is something that is regularly done (note that it does not have to be done *daily*..just routinely)
- ✓ The expected outcomes of the administration are known

- ✓ The PSW has 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*. As well, the training is often client-specific, so the PSW cannot perform the act for another client unless s/he is trained with the new client.

2. Location of Work

Where you work will affect what you can do. If you work in the community or in a retirement home, your employer will set the boundaries (within the range we discussed above) and you may well be asked to administer medications.

If you work 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, you cannot administer medications. There is one exception to this rule. Occasionally, a Registered Nurse or Registered Practical Nurse may delegate the application of 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 regulated health professional who delegated the act, not with the PSW to whom the act was delegated.

3. Local 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.



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4. *Liability: Training, Competencies and Ethics*

Even if a PSW is permitted by legislation and the employer to administer medication, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have been taught the correct method and have 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:

1. *Client Safety* ("First, do no harm"). Medications can be harmful, and at times even fatal. Ensure that you know:
 - a. What your role is to be with the specific client
 - b. How to administer the medication if you are asked to do so
 - c. What to look for and what to look out for after the medication is administered
 - d. Who to call if there is a problem (in some cases, this is the client, but is usually your supervisor, a family member or a health professional)

Do not administer medication that is not part of your role, or appears to be altered or damaged, even if the client urges you to do so.

Remember that sometimes not taking medication can be harmful and even fatal. Medication refusals should be reported as per your agency's policy.

2. *High Quality Care*

Use best practices at all times. If you don't know the current best practice, ask for supervision, training, guidance or assistance before acting. If you are not the only person available to help in the administration of medication, make sure 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.

Before you Administer or Assist

When administering or assisting you must know:

- ✓ Any relevant information about the client, including allergies/health concerns that may be affected by the medication and what you should look out for



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- ✓ 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 there are any problems
- ✓ The records to be kept and the procedure to be used for recording.

As a PSW, you 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.

For more information on personal support workers and PSNO, visit our website:

www.psno.ca