

## **NOTICE TO PATIENTS OF DR. STEWART Fee for Prescriptions Without a Visit**

*October 9, 2017*

I have always strived to provide extraordinary care for patients that is superior in quality as well as convenient for patients.

The last few years have posed tremendous financial challenges for Ontario's hard-working physicians. Since 2012, the Ontario Government has cut family physicians' funding and billings by effectively over 20%. All the while, the costs of overhead, inflation, and taxes have increased without relief. Furthermore, there have been recent advances in technology that improve patient care and convenience, but also cost money. Accordingly, I have been forced to review my office policies and procedures in order to continue to provide the quality care that every patient expects and deserves.

### ***Did you know ... ?***

- The Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) pays for most of your medical visits and services. However, there are many uninsured services, which OHIP does not cover.
- OHIP generally only pays for medical assessments and advice that is given in person, face-to-face, with a patient.
- Medical advice, questions, forms or prescription renewals via telephone, fax, or email are not covered by OHIP (the physician is not being reimbursed a single dollar by OHIP for these services).
- Every single phone call, prescription request, form, letter, note, email, fax, or other such request requires the time, skill, and resources of the staff and physician. Hundreds of such requests every day amount to enormous costs to operate a medical clinic efficiently.

***Effective November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, there will be a \$20 fee for prescriptions without a visit for Dr. Stewart's patients.***

***Please know that the primary purpose is not to collect revenue from patient but rather to decrease the tremendous administrative burden of avoidable prescription requests.***

*Alternatively, patients will always be offered a "Prescription Renewal Visit" prior to medications coming due, noting standard office policy of at least 2 business days for prescription renewals. Otherwise, the fee will be waived.*

## What Else Has Been Tried Before This?

Please know that charging a fee for prescriptions is something I have tried to avoid. For nearly a year, I have led several meetings with staff and the local pharmacy where we have brainstormed and trialed different measures to reduce the number of prescription requests.

We have tried to synchronize all of a patient's medications so that they all come due at once. We have tried to ensure patients have ample repeats on their prescriptions. We have tried reminding patients to check for repeats through multiple methods before contacting our office. We have tried to encourage patients to call in for all their medications at once, rather than one at a time. We have tried to encourage patients to get their prescriptions renewed during actual visits, rather than calling in later.

Unfortunately, none of these efforts have been successful to a satisfactory level. Every day, our office still receives a huge number of prescription requests, even from patients who:

- (i) Already have repeats at their pharmacy;
- (ii) Call in for one medication one day, and then call in for another a few days later, instead of calling in for them all at once;
- (iii) Call in for a prescription even though they just recently saw the doctor and could have asked for it then.
- (iv) Have misplaced prescriptions that were already given.

## How Will Charging a Fee help?

For years, many physicians' offices have already been charging fee for prescriptions without visits. These offices report the following advantages:

- Patients take increased responsibility and improve organization of their medications.
- The number of prescription requests drops significantly, from hundreds down to less than a few per day, in most cases.
- This frees up staff and physician time to care for patients. It also frees up the telephone and fax lines for more urgent matters.
- In many cases, if a patient is running out of medications, it is time for the patient to come in for a visit anyway, which in turn improves patient care.

***Please know that charging a fee is not an attempt to collect revenue from patients. Rather, the primary intent is to decrease the tremendous administrative burden of avoidable prescription requests.***

I look forward to continuing to provide my patients with the quality and timely care they expect and deserve.

Yours truly,

Dr. Adam Stewart