



November 6, 2016

The Honourable Jane Philpott  
70 Colombine Driveway  
Tunney's Pasture  
Postal Location: 0906C  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0K9

Re: Opioid Use in Patients living with Chronic Pain

Dear Minister Philpott,

It is fitting that we are writing this letter on the first day of National Pain Awareness Week.

On behalf of the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance (CAPA), I would like to bring your attention to an important matter affecting the health of people living with arthritis. People with chronic disease, such as arthritis, are diagnosed with the disease in their prime. This has a far-reaching impact on their lives as they try to maintain quality of life despite daily and unrelenting pain. This patient population is already on the receiving end of stigma associated with having to use opioids to manage pain.

The health care system is ill equipped to effectively treat patients who live with chronic pain. Physicians are increasingly becoming reluctant to prescribe effective pain medication despite individual patient histories of long-term, appropriate use. During acute periods of increased pain when primary care is not accessible, pain medications are not prescribed by emergency room physicians.

Many patients report effective pain relief from non-pharmacological treatment options such as physiotherapy, acupuncture and massage therapy. Unfortunately these treatments are only accessible to those with private insurance or those who have their own means to afford payment, except for limited access to physiotherapy in some regions of the country. These non-drug treatments are not available to many patients who cannot afford to pay out of pocket, creating a two-tiered system that harms patients.

CAPA is very concerned that the critical perspective of those living with chronic pain is missing from the dialogue in the upcoming Opioid Conference being hosted by yourself and The Minister of Health from Ontario on November 18, as well as the current HESA hearings on opioid use.

We understand that abuse of these medications is something that needs to be addressed- there are many facets of the issue that government must take into consideration going forward. Policy decisions could have far reaching consequences to Canadian patients and the health care system.

We hope you will consider the impact on everyone affected by this issue. CAPA would be happy to bring our experience as patients who live with chronic pain to the table.

Kind Regards

Linda Wilhelm

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The Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance is a grass-roots, patient-driven, independent, national organization with members across Canada and supporters that are both Canadian and international. We believe the first expert on arthritis is the individual who has the disease. We provide a strong voice and concerted effort to promote the well-being of people living with arthritis and we assist members to become advocates not only for themselves but for all people with arthritis.

cc Bill Casey, HESA Chair