

September 5, 2016

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

Re: Medication safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Dear Minister Philpott,

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 of their lives having a far-reaching impact on their lives. As a result, in 2015, CAPA launched [a project](#) on the important topic of pregnancy and parenting with arthritis. The first phase of the project was to identify patient information needs as it relates to pregnancy and parenting. A survey was launched in September 2015 during Arthritis Awareness month and was intended to be completed by individuals living with arthritis and people in their social support network. We received 150 responses to the survey of which approximately 80% were people living with arthritis. The survey results indicated that:

- 88% of respondents indicated a high need for information about medication safety during pregnancy;
- 82% of respondents indicated a high need for information about medication safety when breastfeeding;
- Access to and reliability of information is lacking (access/awareness ranged from 43% to 70% and reliability/quality of information from 30% to 70%).

I can personally attest to the challenges in accessing reliable, high quality information regarding medication safety having gone through two pregnancies living with Rheumatoid Arthritis. My journey began at an appointment with my family doctor who, upon learning that I wanted to have a baby, referred me for pre-pregnancy counselling. I came out of the counselling session with a long list of warnings about what the medications could do to a growing fetus or that they didn't actually know what the medications could do. One can quickly determine from this scenario that the health of Canadian mothers and children are being put at risk because of the lack of available data.

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.

We now ask that you take a leadership role and place the required focus on the health of Canadian mothers and children. Building on the findings of the [Expert Panel on Therapeutic Products for Infants, Children and Youth](#), it must be recognized that women take medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and many of these medications have not been proven safe and effective for use. **Medications must be studied in pregnant and lactating women and it is in their best interests.**

I ask that through the implementation of the Protecting Canadians from Unsafe Drugs Act (*Food and Drugs Act*) that you take the necessary action to address the serious health risks to pregnant and lactating women. This includes:

- Identifying that Canadian mothers and children are at high risk of negative health outcomes;
- Requesting that drug companies conduct further testing on medications for pregnant and lactating women because of the elevated risk;
- Compelling drug companies to revise the labels of the medications they sell in order to reflect the risk information (or the lack of information altogether);
- Devoting additional research funding to study the use of medication during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Thank you for giving due consideration to the issues brought forward in this letter. It would be appreciated if I could meet in person to further discuss these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Laurie Proulx  
2nd Vice-President  
Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance  
[www.arthritispatient.ca](http://www.arthritispatient.ca)

cc:  
Barbara Njie, Manager, Health Canada  
Ed Morgan, DG, Health Canada  
Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians  
Stephanie Ensworth, Canadian Rheumatology Association  
Joanne Homik, Canadian Rheumatology Association