

AMA backs in-person import of Canadian Rx if safety is assured

NOV 12, 2018

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Letting American patients import prescription drugs in person from licensed Canadian brick-and-mortar pharmacies has the potential to improve cost-sharing levels and address a major barrier to medication adherence, according to an AMA Council on Medical Service report whose recommendations were adopted at the 2018 AMA Interim Meeting.

“Allowing for the in-person importation of prescription drugs from licensed Canadian pharmacies is not a comprehensive, long-term solution to addressing the problem of unaffordability of prescription drugs in the U.S.,” says the report. “However, patients that face high and unaffordable costs for their prescription drugs need relief in the meantime.”

Canadians spend about half the \$1,026 that Americans spend, per capita, on prescription drugs each year.

The AMA House of Delegates adopted policy to:

- Support the in-person purchase and importation of Health Canada-approved prescription drugs obtained directly from a licensed Canadian pharmacy when product integrity can be assured, provided such drugs are for personal use and of a limited quantity.
- Advocate an increase in funding for the Food and Drug Administration to administer and enforce a program that allows the in-person purchase and importation of prescription drugs from Canada, if the integrity of prescription drug products imported for personal use can be assured.

“Faced with high out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs, some Americans travel to Canada to purchase and import their medications, as it’s oftentimes more affordable,” said AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD.

“While it generally remains illegal for individuals to import prescription drugs into the U.S. for personal use, the FDA has used its enforcement discretion to allow the personal importation of prescription drugs under very limited circumstances,” Dr. McAneny added. “Allowing for the in-person importation of prescription drugs from Canada, if product integrity can be assured, represents a step forward, as well as a measured and conservative option to lower patient costs for prescription drugs.”

AMA policy already opposes the personal importation of prescription drugs via the internet until patient safety can be assured and opposes the illegal importation of prescription drugs and drug counterfeiting.

“The AMA policy comes as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and lawmakers are examining options to lower patient costs for prescription drugs, including through importing prescription drugs from Canada,” said Dr. McAneny. “The new policy will help direct AMA support for relevant regulatory and legislative activity.”