

Training Guideline for Personal Support Workers Administering Drugs in Long-Term Care

May 1, 2023

Highlights:

- Role of a long-term care home when the home is using personal support workers to support drug administration to residents
- Role of personal support worker in long-term care
- Who is considered a personal support worker for drug administration
- Guidelines for training of personal support workers in long term care homes in drug administration
- Role of registered nursing staff in assigning and supervising a personal support worker in administering a drug
- Additional resources

Introduction

[Ontario Regulation 246/22](#) (Regulation), under the [Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021](#) (Act) enables personal support workers to administer non-controlled drugs within long-term care homes (as they can in other congregate settings like retirement homes) under specific conditions and in accordance with limitations as set out in the Regulation.

This guideline outlines the steps that long-term care licensees need to take to update their medication management policies and procedures should they choose to implement the enabling provision, as well as the components that must be included in training for personal support workers.

Role of the Long-Term Care Home

The regulation enables personal support workers to administer drugs under the prescribed conditions, including that any personal support worker who will administer drugs to a resident be trained in the administration of drugs and be assigned and supervised to perform the drug administration by a member of the home's registered nursing staff.

The implementation of the administration of drugs by personal support workers is at the discretion of each long-term care home with implementation grounded in the principles of safety, quality, transparency, and collaboration. If a long-term care home decides to implement this provision, **it must be included in the home's written policies and procedures**. This includes:

- documenting the home's implementation of this provision,
- the requirements/limitations for personal support workers to administer drugs,
- training requirements (including timeframe for re-training),
- documentation processes, and
- the requirements for registered nursing staff to assign and supervise.

In developing these policies, long-term care homes should engage with their resident and family councils (where established).

Once finalized, these policies must be shared with residents and families upon their admission to the home and upon request by prospective residents and their families. A home's change management process to support initial implementation should include tailored and clear information for residents and families to ensure a good understanding of what personal support workers are enabled to perform, under what conditions, and what safeguards are in place to ensure safe drug administration to residents. Residents and families are always able to share concerns about their care, including those related to drug administration, with their home's staff or administration who can help mitigate and address those concerns.

A long-term care home's written policies and procedures and related communication on the administration of drugs by personal support workers should allow for individual choice by personal support workers as to whether or not to participate in the administration of drugs, even after they have chosen to receive training, with such choice being free of undue pressure or risk of reprisal. A personal support worker should also be empowered to raise concerns with the supervising member of the home's registered nursing staff if they are asked to administer a drug, and if they believe there is a risk to the resident. For example, if they are unsure about a certain drug and/or resident condition.

Homes should maintain an up to date, written record of personal support workers who have completed the necessary training to administer drugs and make this available to the home's registered nursing staff.

Homes should also consider formalizing an evaluation process for personal support worker drug administration and provide an update to their quarterly medication management committee as well as to their Resident and Family Councils upon request. This evaluation process could include reviews of medication incidents, resident and family concerns, audits of documentation involving drug administration by a personal support worker, or periodic observing of personal support workers administering drugs.

Role of the Personal Support Worker

Personal support workers provide supportive care to residents living in long-term care homes, including (but not limited to) individuals experiencing cognitive and intellectual impairments, physical and mental health challenges and illnesses, by assisting them with their activities of daily living.

In long-term care homes, personal support workers are valuable members of the interprofessional team who develop effective working relationships with team members and participate in the delivery, reporting and documentation of care as directed by the plan of care.¹

Personal support workers use effective communication skills to develop therapeutic relationships with residents and their families and assist with activities of daily living as directed by the plan of care. They also help promote a safe and comfortable environment for all residents including (but not limited to) those experiencing responsive behaviours, those at risk of abuse or neglect, and those requiring palliative and end-of-life care while ensuring safe environments for themselves and others.²

Definition of a Personal Support Worker

Long-term care homes must ensure that those they hire as personal support workers satisfy the requirements set out in the Regulation for those who provide personal support services to residents. This helps ensure the safety of residents and the quality of care they receive.

For the purpose of this guideline, a personal support worker is someone who meets the requirements set out in [subsection 52 \(1\)](#) or who is described in [subsection 52 \(3\)](#) in the Regulation.

Additionally, internationally trained nurses currently working as personal support workers that meet the qualifications outlined in the Regulation may administer drugs to residents.

Training for Personal Support Workers to Administer Drugs in Long-Term Care

A key requirement for personal support workers to be able to administer drugs in a long-term care home is the completion of training in the administration of drugs. The Regulation does not prescribe specific training programs. This guideline sets out the components that personal support workers need to be trained on before they can be eligible for administering drugs.

It is the responsibility of the long-term care home to validate that a personal support worker has completed the appropriate training before they are able to administer drugs. This may mean that a personal support worker requires additional training, over and above the completion of a personal support worker program to ensure that each component of necessary training has been completed. Homes should consider the criteria for successful completion of the training to help ensure the personal support workers' successful acquisition of each of the components.

¹ Personal Support Worker Standard, January 2022, p.6

² Ibid, p.6

These components include:

- **Roles and responsibilities: Unregulated Care Providers and Regulated Health Professionals**
 - Ensure the personal support worker understands:
 - Their role and what can be assigned to them in respect of drug administration,
 - The responsibilities of other care team members in respect of drug administration, and who can assign drug administration to them, and what acts can and cannot be assigned.
 - The benefit of effective communication skills in developing therapeutic relationships.
- **Legislative and regulatory requirements of Personal Support Workers**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has:
 - An understanding of the legislative and regulatory requirements in the Act and Regulation that are pertinent to their role in providing direct care to residents.
- **Home's Medication Management Policies and Procedures**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has an understanding of the policies, procedures and expectations of their home related to drug administration and medication management.
 - Ensure the personal support worker is familiar with the importance of medication reconciliation as part of medication management, and where to locate relevant information for each resident if needed prior to drug administration.
- **Medical terminology**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has an understanding and working familiarity with medical and medication-related terms that are used in drug administration in the home.
- **Medication orders and order types**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has an understanding of the different kinds of medication orders and types of those orders.
 - Topical, eye and ear drop administration.
- **Classification of clinical conditions, medication, expected outcomes and adverse drug reactions**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has a general understanding of the typical chronic conditions of residents, including, but not limited to:
 - Dementia and age-related cognitive changes
 - Hypertension
 - Coronary, stroke, and vascular disease
 - Diabetes (covered below)
 - Gastroesophageal reflux disease
 - Others dependent upon resident population
 - Ensure the personal support worker has an understanding of drug classifications, their purpose and potential side effects and adverse reactions.
- **Documentation**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has
 - An understanding of the documentation requirements for drug administration to ensure safe practices and processes.
 - Knowledge of error-prone abbreviations, symbols and dose designations (a [resource](#) available from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP).
 - Knowledge of medication incident reporting requirements and procedures when a medication incident occurs.

- **Diabetes Education**
 - Ensure the personal support worker has a knowledge of diabetes and its conditions, signs and symptoms, as well as an understanding of the signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia.
- **Identifying Changes in Resident Behaviours/Conditions**
 - Ensure the personal support worker understands symptoms of common conditions among the long-term care resident population as well as potential changes in residents' conditions and behaviour that can occur with medication.
 - Ensure the personal support worker understands how to escalate concerns about a medication matter or a change in the clinical condition of a resident.

Registered Nursing Staff Assigning and Supervising Drug Administration by Personal Support Workers

In order for a personal support worker to administer a drug to long-term care resident, they must first be trained in the administration of drugs and satisfy any other requirements as prescribed in their home's written policies. If these requirements are satisfied, then a member of the registered nursing staff may assign and supervise, should they choose to, a personal support worker in the administration of drugs.

Registered nursing staff who assign a personal support worker to administer a drug should:

- Know the personal support worker is competent to perform the particular procedure or activity safely for the resident in the given circumstances. When teaching a personal support worker, a nurse is expected to have first-hand knowledge of the personal support worker's competence. A nurse who assigns and supervises is expected to verify that the personal support worker's competence has been determined each time they assign the administration of a drug by a personal support worker. A nurse should consult the home's current list of personal support workers who are qualified to administer drugs when determining the skills and competence of the personal support worker.
- Ensure that the personal support worker:
 - understands the extent of their responsibilities in administering drugs,
 - knows when and who to ask for assistance, and
 - knows when, how and to whom to report the outcome of the procedure.

Registered nursing staff retain responsibility for:

- Ensuring there is an ongoing assessment of the client's health care needs,
- Developing/updating a plan of care,
- Evaluating the client's condition and
- Judge the ongoing effectiveness of the personal support worker's interventions.³

The supervision provided by registered nursing staff is to be in accordance with any practice standard and guidelines issued by the College of Nurses of Ontario.⁴

³ College of Nurses of Ontario, Working With Unregulated Care Providers, 2013, p.3

⁴ College of Nurses of Ontario, Working With Unregulated Care Providers, 2013, p.7
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It is important for registered nursing staff to remember that there are two important restrictions to drug administration by personal support workers. A personal support worker cannot administer a drug if the administration involves the performance of a controlled act under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*. This would include drugs administered by injection, like insulin, or drugs administered by inhalations, like oxygen.

In addition, personal support workers cannot administer a controlled substance to a resident such as a narcotic or opioid. While there is no all-encompassing definition of a non-controlled medication nor a fulsome list, detailed lists of controlled substances can be found in [Schedules I through VI under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, 1996](#) which clearly sets out which drugs are controlled.

As well, homes may also consider an additional measure of prohibiting personal support workers from administering high-alert medications. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada has developed [a list of high-alert medications](#) for long-term care which homes could consider in developing their written policies and procedures for the administration of drugs by personal support workers.

Further Resources

- [Ontario Regulation 246/22 under the under Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021](#)
- Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada, [High-Alert Medications in Long-Term Care](#)
- College of Nurses of Ontario, [Working with unregulated care providers](#) Practice Guideline
- College of Nurses of Ontario, [Working with Unregulated Care Providers FAQ](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Medication Management in Long-Term Care](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Drug Administration in Long-Term Care](#)