Education and Health
Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Council

2016.03 **Warning Labels on Food and Drug Products for all Inactive Substances and Additives**

Whereas, Food and drug products approved by Health Canada do not have adequate warning labels regarding all inactive substances and additives, such as colouring agents and excipients, which may cause adverse reactions; therefore, be it

Resolved, That national council of The Catholic Women's League of Canada, in 96th annual national convention assembled, urge the federal government:

- to require detailed warning labels on food and drug products containing all inactive substances and additives that may cause adverse reactions
- to require that patient information sheets accompanying pharmaceuticals include a list of all inactive substances and potential adverse reactions
- to engage in a program of public education focusing on the possible adverse effects of all inactive substances and additives.

BRIEF: Warning Labels on Food and Drug Products for all Inactive Substances and Additives

Currently, there are warning labels on food and drug products. However, adequate warning labels regarding all inactive substances and additives, such as colouring agents and excipients, which may cause adverse reactions, are lacking.

"A food additive is any chemical substance that is added to food during preparation or storage and either becomes a part of the food or affects its characteristics for the purpose of achieving a particular technical effect" (Health Canada). "Substances that are used in food to maintain its nutritive quality, enhance its keeping quality, make it attractive or to aid in its processing, packaging or storage are all considered to be food additives" (Health Canada).

The executive summary published in the *Canada Gazette* (June 13, 2015) identifies issues with current labeling. "Regulations provide food manufacturers with the choice of declaring added food colours by either their common name (i.e. Citrus Red No. 2) or simply as 'colours'. When the term 'colour'" is used, this non-specific descriptor does not provide sufficient information to those with sensitivities to certain food colours" (*Gazette*). Proposed amendments contained in the *Regulations Amending the Food and Drug Regulations – Nutrition Labelling, Other Labelling Provisions and Food Colours* "aim to mitigate that risk and to align food colour labeling requirements with those of other food additives by mandating that food colours be identified using their common names in the ingredient list" (*Gazette*).

All health products require a product license before they can be sold in Canada. The product license label informs consumers that the product has been reviewed and is authorized by Health Canada for safety and efficacy, provided that the product is being used according to its recommended directions for use in product labeling (Health Canada).

An excipient is defined as "an inactive substance that serves as the vehicle or medium for a drug or other active substance" (*Oxford Dictionary*). "In the pharmaceutical formulation, excipients may be: preservatives, dyes, flavourings, sweeteners, thickeners, emulsifiers, stabilizers, or antioxidants. They keep medication free from micro-organisms and proper for consumption for longer time spans, besides making them tasty and thus favouring treatment compliance" (Khanal).

"Excipient related adverse drug reactions (ADR) are common in clinical practise" (Strauss). For example, lactose is an excipient often used as a filler and bulking agent or sprayed on a tablet for a shiny appearance but dangerous for a consumer who is lactose intolerant; docusate sodium used as a lubricating agent has potential laxative effects; an inadvertent intake of sugar-containing medicines by diabetics can cause severe reactions (Khanal).

Consumers need to be able to make informed choices about food and health products. The federal government is urged to require adequate warning labels on food and drug products containing all inactive substances, additives, colours and excipients that may cause adverse reactions, to require that patient information sheets accompanying pharmaceuticals include a list of all inactive substances and potential adverse reactions as well as to engage in a program of public education focusing on the possible adverse effects of these substances.

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Action Plan

1. Write letters to the prime minister, minister of health and your local member of parliament, asking:
    - for adequate warning labels on food and drug products containing all inactive substances and additives that may cause adverse reactions
    - that patient information sheets accompanying pharmaceuticals include a list of all inactive substances and potential adverse reactions
    - to support a program of public education focusing on the possible adverse effects of all inactive substances and additives.
2. Raise members' awareness of the danger of possible adverse reactions to inactive substances and additives in drug and food products.
3. Monitor the federal government's response to the request contained in the resolution food and drug products.