

## **Ontario study to evaluate pharmacist-administered flu shots**

Written by Sonya Felix on February 19, 2014 for CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca

Three-year project will assess how pharmacists are doing as immunizers.

---

This spring, thousands of Ontario pharmacists will receive surveys designed to gather information about attitudes to immunizations and shed light on how pharmacists are doing as immunizers and how the program could be improved.

The survey is part of a three-year "pharmacists as immunizers" research project being undertaken by the Ontario Pharmacy Research Collaboration (OPEN) at the University of Waterloo.

*The government has invested a lot of money in pharmacy and is keen to find out the impact of that investment*

Primarily funded by a \$5.77 million grant from the Ontario government, the immunization study is just one of several new research initiatives that OPEN is conducting to evaluate the effectiveness of current pharmacy services and to pilot and evaluate new ones.

"The government has invested a lot of money in pharmacy and is keen to find out the impact of that investment," says Nancy Waite, co-leader on the pharmacists as immunizers project.

She notes that representatives from various health organizations are involved, as well as the Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA), the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP) and the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA).

"We expect that the results of this study will be used to increase the uptake of immunization by pharmacists and to make policy recommendations or suggest changes in the delivery of services."

A large representative group of pharmacists will be asked to fill out the survey once the current flu season is finished.

"We are interested as much in pharmacists who don't give immunizations as we are in ones that do," says Waite, adding that the data is expected to come in over the next six months and the results will be ready in the fall.

"We want to get it in as quickly as possible so that any learnings can be applied to the next flu season."

As well as the survey, OPEN researchers will use a variety of other data, including pharmacists' billing data, to determine the number of flu shots given by pharmacists and to analyze the demographic and regional trends.

"We want to know who is going to the pharmacy for their flu shot," explains Waite. "Is it younger people, families or seniors? Does uptake change in different areas? Are high risk people coming in to the pharmacy for their shot?"

Data will also be used to compare the number of pharmacist-administered flu vaccines to those given by physicians and public health nurses.

“By looking at the overall numbers we want to find out if the number of patients getting vaccinated has increased overall or if the number has shifted from public health clinics and physicians’ offices to pharmacies,” Waite adds.

“We certainly hope that immunization rates are going up but if people are going to pharmacies because of the convenience factor, that’s great too. Maybe next year the rates will increase.”

Thousands of patients who got their flu shots at pharmacies will also get a chance to provide their perspective when the second phase of the research project kicks in next year.

They’ll be asked questions such as how they decide where to get their flu shot, who in the family makes the decision and why they chose to be vaccinated at a pharmacy.

Lastly, the researchers will set up focus groups to better understand healthcare providers’ perception of pharmacist-administered flu shots.

The results of the research will be shared with OPEN’s primary knowledge users, including the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, OCP, OPA, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists Ontario Branch and pharmacy groups that include the Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores (CACDS), Rexall Pharma Plus and Shoppers Drug Mart.

“We’re seeing significant numbers of immunizations at pharmacies and we want to ensure that pharmacists do as many as possible and as efficiently as possible,” says Waite. “We are definitely looking forward to presenting the results.”

---