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Buying Drugs From Canada: Can It Last?

By Kirk A. Johnson

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Americans are embracing the modem and abandoning the motor vehicle in search of cheaper drug prices and Canadian pharmacies are the destination. The neighbor to the north has become the savior of the health-plan meek, and the cash mild, by filling their prescriptions for savings of up to 80%. Yet, while the willing Canadians share their good fortune of lower-priced drugs, unfriendly forces plot their demise. Doctors associations, pharma giants, and government agencies are doing their best to thwart this "humanitarian effort".

Canadian pharmacies, and especially their online counterparts, are flourishing in today's shop-at-home environment. The process of ordering prescription drugs is relatively simple. You find a web drug store you like, choose the prescription drugs you need, tally the cost in a shopping cart, fill out a questionnaire, then mail in, or fax, your prescription and signed consent form and presto – instant savings. For some, especially America's seniors, it also means not having to choose which drug you will have to forego this month, or the next.

So why is this seemingly win-win situation under so much pressure? For starters, because it's illegal. The FDA says the same drugs that have been approved in the U.S. but originate in Canada are considered unapproved new drugs and are therefore illegal for import. However, since it has previously allowed U.S. citizens to import needed drugs that are unavailable in the U.S., it has made exceptions for personal use drug imports.

For the FDA, the fact remains that the drugs are illegal. This is the position they are advocating with many U.S. governors, like Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich who has been contemplating Canadian drug reimportation in the face of U.S. law. Minnesota's governor Tim Pawlenty created a referral web site for residents to purchase drugs from two Canadian pharmacies it researched and has okayed. Growing numbers of states are seriously looking at reducing budgets or helping residents reduce the burden of high priced prescription meds through Canadian pharmacies.

Demand for Canadian prescription drugs is high, so what about supply. David McKay, head of the Canadian International Pharmacy Association, will meet with U.S. governors at their upcoming summit on drug importation to ask for their help with the large pharmaceutical companies. The pharma giants

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have begun restricting supply to Canadian pharmacies in an effort to quell the flow south. For the pharma giants, as the drugs flow south, so do their profits.

Canadian pharmacies have made a commitment to take care of Canadians first but there is a loud cry for their services across the border. Some critics accuse that it's all about money, and that Canadian online pharmacies are making a mint selling drugs to American citizens.

It was that same argument that the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) used when deciding to go after the doctors who are "chain-signing" prescriptions. When a prescription from an U.S. doctor comes to a pharmacy in Canada, the Canadian doctor reviews the patient's medical questionnaire along with the prescription received, and then writes out a new prescription for the drugs to be dispensed, according to Canadian law. The CMA says doctors should not sign prescriptions if the patient has not

been seen in a personal exam.

This type of professional peer pressure is the doctors lobby at stopping, or significantly slowing the process they feel hurts the profession. So far 1 Manitoba doctor has been fined \$10,000 for signing more than 9,000 prescriptions and 3 others accused of professional misconduct by the College of Physicians and surgeons.

With the recent Medicare changes so slow in coming, and so slow in creating any change, the need for aid from Canadian pharmacies will continue a good while longer. It is truly unfortunate that a service providing a "humanitarian effort", has more than its share of negative forces working against it. It begs the all-important question, "Can it last?" Only time will tell.

Kirk A. Johnson is the writer/publisher for the Online Pharmacy Digest <http://www.onlinepharmacydigest.com> . The premiere guide for consumers to the online pharmacy industry offers informative articles, current news, and web site reviews.

Hardwood Flooring - The Next Generation

By Prescription Drug Web Guide

For a long time, Americans who are increasingly facing low supplies and high costs have been heading north to purchase their prescription drugs at stores in Canada. The volume of business is expected to be millions of prescriptions filled every year. And during recent elections, many candidates ran on platforms seeking to legalize the practice that many citizens are engaging in whether it is illegal or not.

To combat both the election hopefuls and the United States citizens who are currently ignoring the pricy prescription drugs on American shelves, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America is claiming that many imported drugs are unsafe. There is more evidence to the contrary, however.

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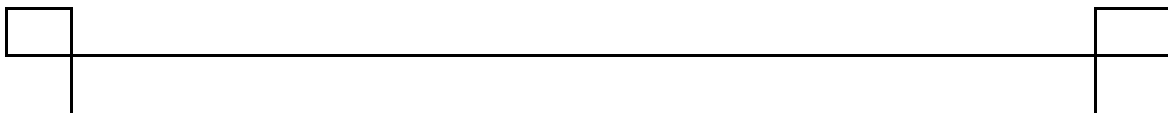
Many of the prescription drugs that are available on American pharmacy shelves quite legally, are already manufactured in and shipped from foreign countries. This is counter to the PRMA's assertions that imported drugs are unfit or dangerous. Many industry insiders agree that the association is representing solely the interests of American pharmaceutical companies, who directly benefit from inflated drug prices. Like many other countries, Canada's prescription drugs, like the prescription drugs of every industrialized nation with the exception of the United States, are kept relatively inexpensive due to price controls.

The FDA is in step with the PRMA, although it is similarly vague in assertions that buying prescription drugs in Canada is dangerous. In an interview with Kiplinger's, William Hubbard, the FDA's associate commissioner for policy and learning, stated "We know there are good drugs and bad drugs in Canada, but we can't tell you which ones are which."

The fact is, most Canadian prescription drugs are not FDA approved, however Canadian food and drug standards are comparable to those of the United States', and the argument that Canadian prescription drugs are unsafe, remains fairly unsupported. So far, the stream of American buyers seems to indicate the belief that buying prescription drugs from a reputable Canadian drug store is only dangerous to the large American pharmaceutical companies who have a vested interest in keeping drug prices high.



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