

April 8, 2020

The Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health
Address Locator 0900C2
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
hcminister.ministresc@canada.ca

Dear Minister Hajdu,

The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) is the national professional association for Canadian rheumatologists, representing close to 600 rheumatologists across Canada. We are kindly requesting your attention regarding the shortage of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), an essential medicine for many patients with rheumatic conditions and the only medication shown to increase survival in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus while preventing flares, organ damage and cardiovascular events.

HCQ is currently being studied as a potential treatment for COVID-19 infection. This, combined with intense media attention on the drug as a potential cure or preventative medication, has led to a surge in off-label prescribing, which has depleted supplies in certain areas of Canada. Some local authorities have been forced to restrict access to HCQ to only certain groups of patients and reduce the dispensed amount.

We commend the actions of regulatory bodies and colleges across the country who have published position statements and recommendations against off-label prescribing and have encouraged adherence to practices supported by scientific evidence. We are supportive of current and planned research ethics board approved clinical trials of HCQ in COVID-19 infection. However, we remain very concerned that Canada's supply of this essential medicine for rheumatic conditions is threatened by the surge of off-label prescribing noted above, its use in clinical trials and in acute settings at hospitals for treatment of COVID-19 infection, as well as anticipated interruptions to the international supply chain routes. As such, we are kindly requesting your attention and intervention to address this important matter.

The CRA acknowledges the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic and urges the Federal Government to increase Canada's supply of HCQ to meet the higher demand for all patients who need it. We recommend the following:

1. Work with key stakeholders including decision makers and industry representatives to ensure no interruption in HCQ supply while taking into consideration the increased demand by considering all avenues, including but not limited to securing multiple sources for supply, to ensure redundancy as well as encourage a 'Made-in-Canada' manufacturing option. We are aware that there have been offers from various manufacturers to provide additional doses of HCQ for clinical trials, including manufacturers not currently providing product in Canada. We do recommend that HCQ required for clinical trials should be sourced from these manufacturers rather than from the inventory historically available to our patients.

2. Consult with rheumatologists during key decision-making in relation to the ongoing allocation of HCQ supply. Rheumatologists are experts in treatment using HCQ for rheumatologic

diseases, for which the medication is approved by Health Canada. Decisions regarding HCQ supply should incorporate recommendations from the CRA, the national voice of Canadian rheumatologists.

The CRA works closely with key stakeholders including government officials, disease and patient groups and other national and provincial medical associations. We appreciate your consideration and are available to support you as a resource in your consultations with rheumatologists.

Please contact Dr. Ahmad Zbib, Chief Executive Officer, at (905) 952-0698 ext. 8, or azbib@rheum.ca if you have any questions or if we can lend any assistance.

Sincerely,



Evelyn Sutton, MD, FRCPC, FACP
President
Canadian Rheumatology Association

CC: Mr. Gagan Sikand, MP, Mississauga-Streetsville
Dr. Rosie Scuccimarri, Chair of Therapeutics Committee, Canadian Rheumatology Association
Dr. Carter Thorne, Chair of Stakeholder Engagement Committee, Canadian Rheumatology Association