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Pharmacists serve major role

By JENNIFER DYCK Morning Star Staff

Pharmacists, health care's medication experts, are being celebrated for the vital role they play in community health.

The B.C. Pharmacy Association is capping off the end of Pharmacist Awareness Week. The goal is to let the public know that pharmacists are ready and available to help with health care needs.

Many people don't realize the scope of services pharmacists provide. In addition to dispensing medication, pharmacists provide one-on-one counselling on a number of issues.

"We're always on the phone answering questions," said Peter Hirschmiller, pharmacist and new owner of Vernon's Shopper's Drug Mart. "It's what we do."

Because pharmacists are the experts on medication they are available to answer medicine-related questions.

One key group of individuals that pharmacists deal with often is parents and grandparents. They call in with questions varying from what drugs to use while breast feeding to when a baby should be given acetaminophen.

They are all very legitimate questions, said Hirschmiller, and are ones that more parents should be asking pharmacists instead of emergency room doctors.

"I think people need to know, 'can I deal with this at home or do I need to go to emergency?' They could probably avoid an unnecessary emergency visit."

With the overcrowded conditions in Vernon Jubilee Hospital's emergency room, Hirschmiller said it is often unnecessary to wait two or three hours for a doctor to say it is OK to give a baby Tylenol.

Those who resort to walk-in clinics or those who do not have a family doctor, should also keep pharmacists in mind.

In celebration of Pharmacist Awareness Week, these easy-to-access health care professionals have come up with the top 10 essentials for a new parents baby bag.

The number one item, which is available free of charge at pharmacies, is the B.C. Health Guide handbook. It provides practical information on how to recognize and cope with common health concerns and also includes a 24-hour pharmacist help line.

The remaining items include baby shampoo, baby oil, infant cotton swabs, infant acetaminophen, petroleum jelly, baby powder, zinc oxide ointment and antiseptic baby wipes. Last, but not least, is something for mom: vitamins and nutritional supplements.

For more information or answers to questions such as how much acetaminophen to give a baby (Hirschmiller says it is more important to dose according to weight rather than age) contact your local pharmacist.



lisa vandervelde/morning star

Pharmacist Peter Hirschmiller holds infant acetaminophen, one of the products that new parents often ask advice for before using.

