



Department of Health

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November 2015

Dear Colleague,

Greetings, and welcome to my first monthly letter to the state's physicians. As a doctor for over 30 years, I know how challenging it is to stay abreast of new developments. That's why I'm launching this monthly letter. Each letter, which I'll try to keep to one page, will discuss two of today's timely public health issues and what the New York State Department of Health is doing about them. This month, I want to focus on (1) medical marijuana and (2) antimicrobial resistance.

Medical marijuana: Beginning early next year, state providers will be able to prescribe medical marijuana to patients with certain conditions such as multiple sclerosis, ALS, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and neuropathies. Evidence suggests that medical marijuana may mitigate pain, severe nausea and loss of appetite. The smoking of marijuana is strictly banned. Instead, the drug will be delivered by vaporization, oils, pills, and other consumables. The Health Department has registered five organizations to manufacture and dispense medical marijuana under strict guidelines in various regions of the state.

If you have patients who may benefit from medical marijuana, I urge you to consider taking the online practitioner course. The four-hour state-approved course provides 4.5 hours of CME credit. The course will provide information on the pharmacology of marijuana, contraindications, side effects, adverse reactions; overdose prevention, drug interactions, dosing and routes of administration. It will also discuss the risks and benefits of marijuana as well as warnings and precautions, and abuse and dependence. Once you complete the course, you will need to register for the Medical Marijuana Program if you want to certify eligible patients. For more information, visit: https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical_marijuana/practitioner/.

Antimicrobial resistance: When Alexander Fleming accepted the Nobel Prize for discovering penicillin in 1945, he warned that antibiotics could one day lose effectiveness. Today, his prediction is coming true. Overuse of antibiotics for non-bacterial conditions and patients' failure to complete appropriately prescribed courses of antibiotics have led to significant increases in antibiotic resistance of common gram-negative infections, among others.

To address this issue, the Health Department is working with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its "[Get Smart](#)" campaign to educate providers and patients on the appropriate use of antimicrobial agents, targeting regions with high antibiotic use and enlisting physicians to help bring down rates. Though we all know we can't treat viral infections with antibiotics, studies show that providers often succumb to perceived pressure from patients. As the state moves forward on efforts to educate and inform, we hope that you will do your part to educate your patients about proper antibiotic use.

I wish you all a pleasant autumn, and please stay tuned for next month's letter.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health