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Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and Documentation by Registered Nurses

With many family practice teams across the province adopting electronic medical records (EMR) in family practices, some concerns related to how the system records nursing documentation have come to the forefront. Family practice nurses (FPN) have expressed concern that the EMR records documentation in such a manner that it might appear that the FPN has prescribed a drug or made a diagnosis. The reason for this is that in some EMRs the FPN's name is attached to these activities. This has resulted in some nurses feeling uncomfortable in documenting the diagnosis or printing the prescription. In these highly collaborative team practices, this can have an impact on patient care, efficiency, and productivity.

In response to this concern, key stakeholders from the Department of Health and Wellness (including PHIM) were consulted about the best approach and the following is advised:

- When a registered nurse documents a diagnosis in the EMR, this does not mean that she/he has made the diagnosis. The nurse is documenting that a patient has been seen for a pre-existing diagnosis or that another team member (physician or nurse practitioner) has made the diagnosis at that visit. This is within the scope of practice for a registered nurse.
- When a registered nurse prints a prescription or prepares a prescription to be faxed, this does not mean that the nurse has prescribed a medication. The act of prescribing occurs when the physician or nurse practitioner reviews and signs the prescription. The prescription is not valid and cannot be filled without this signature.
- It is recommended that nurses, physicians, nurse practitioners, and other health care providers document care under their individual "log-in" and do not share their password or log-in with other providers.

Family practice teams in the province can be reassured that registered nurses can continue to work to the full scope of practice without concern for the implications of the documentation practices described above. This is how the EMR software functions and should not alter appropriate nursing practice.



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