

**Home Narrowband Ultraviolet B Phototherapy for Photoresponsive Skin Conditions: Health Quality  
Ontario Draft Recommendation – Feedback from the Canadian Psoriasis Network**

**November 14, 2019**

The Canadian Psoriasis Network (CPN) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to Health Quality Ontario's (HQO) draft recommendation on Home Narrowband Ultraviolet B Phototherapy (NB-UVB) for Photoresponsive Skin Conditions.

CPN is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of people living with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. We do this by providing current information on research and treatment options and by working with others to build awareness and advocacy about the complexities of these conditions.

As you may be aware, psoriasis is a non-communicable, chronic inflammatory condition that affects the regeneration of skin cells. It typically affects the elbows, knees and scalp, but it can also occur on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, nails, genitals and torso. Symptoms may come and go—flare up then go into remission. Having psoriasis may increase the risk of developing other health conditions like psoriatic arthritis, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease and depression. For many, psoriasis is a manageable condition; for others, psoriasis can affect all aspects of one's life including self-image, sleep, interpersonal relationships and work. It can greatly affect quality of life, especially if symptoms are persistent and severe.

Our feedback is based on over a decade of working with people with psoriasis and their families including from surveys we have conducted of our membership and broader community about living with the condition. Though the draft recommendation applies to photoresponsive skin conditions more generally, our feedback is strictly from the perspective of psoriasis.

**Support for the recommendation**

CPN supports HQO's draft recommendation to publicly fund home NB-UVB phototherapy as a treatment option for people with psoriasis.

Home phototherapy can be an ideal treatment option especially in cases where people have to travel a long distance to outpatient clinics or have to miss school or work to attend sessions. As stated in the draft recommendation, home NB-UVB phototherapy could be beneficial for those who find outpatient

clinic NB-UVB phototherapy inconvenient or inaccessible. CPN continues to hear about the barriers to accessing phototherapy in an outpatient setting especially in rural or remote locations. There are few clinics that deliver this service across Ontario, and Canada more widely, especially in rural locations, and attending sessions during clinic hours several times a week can be burdensome or even unfeasible for some. Costs for transportation to and from appointments, missed school or work, and disruption of schedules for individuals and family members are some of the concerns that we hear about from our community.

We often get questions about how to access home NB-UVB phototherapy, suggesting an interest in this therapy. Though phototherapy equipment is currently listed as an allowable Medical Expense Tax Credit under the *Income Tax Act*, costs can still be a deterrent for people seeking this form of treatment. Though some private insurance plans fully or partially cover home phototherapy units, public plans generally do not. In addition to creating greater access in Ontario, a positive recommendation from HQO can be leveraged by organizations like CPN to promote better access with other public and private payers across Canada that do not currently reimburse this form of treatment.

### **Considerations for Implementation**

1. Though we are pleased that there is a draft positive recommendation for funding of this home-based intervention, we are concerned about whether appropriate public funding will be allocated to implementation should the draft recommendation be adopted.
2. Another consideration is around appropriate safeguards for publicly funded home NB-UVB treatment to ensure that people get the information and support that they need for safe utilization of this therapy. Research suggests that there are ideal patients for home UVB, and that patient education and support from a doctor while using home UVB is important to minimize any safety concerns.<sup>1</sup> The draft recommendation points out that home NB-UVB phototherapy has the same possible side effects as outpatient clinic NB-UVB phototherapy, so it would be important that in the home setting, people are aware of how to properly use the treatment, how to minimize risks and what to do and who to consult should they have an adverse event or side effect. Creating low-barrier safeguards, such as requiring an initial in-clinic session if feasible or evidence of clinical oversight at least annually, are ideas to explore for implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhutani, T. & Liao, W. (2010). A practical approach to home UVB phototherapy for the treatment of generalized psoriasis. *Practical Dermatology*, 7(2): 31–35.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share insights from our experience and for your consideration of our feedback. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or opportunities for further engagement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Antonella Scali".

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