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## PRESS RELEASE

### MoHW Addresses Public Concerns Regarding Over-the-Counter Medicines in Belize

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In recent weeks, there has been growing public concern regarding the dispensing of prescription medicines in pharmacies across Belize. As part of our ongoing commitment, the MoHW is providing a detailed update regarding the availability and safe use of over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medicines across the country.

The Ministry clarifies that no new regulation requiring prescriptions has been implemented. This requirement has always existed, as prescription medicines require proper diagnosis and medical oversight to ensure safe and appropriate use. Furthermore, the Ministry has not taken any abrupt enforcement action that would disrupt access to medicines for the public. In fact, the MoHW has conducted consultation sessions with the public, as well as with the pharmacy association, over the last year regarding improving access to medicines and ensuring their safe usage.

To ensure continued access to medicines, OTC medicines exist in Belize. These are general sales OTC and pharmacy sales OTC. These medicines are considered safe to use without the oversight of a doctor and continue to be available in pharmacies and stores in Belize without a prescription.

General Sales OTC medicines	Pharmacy Sales OTC medicines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They may be purchased at your corner store, supermarket, or convenience store without the need to visit a pharmacy.</li> <li>• They are considered safe enough to be used by consumers as indicated on the label, with no technical advice from a health professional.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They must be purchased at pharmacies.</li> <li>• They contain ingredients that are safe but may require the technical guidance of a registered pharmacist.</li> <li>• They do not need a prescription to purchase</li> </ul>

The public may purchase OTC medicines for a wide variety of common health issues such as headaches, colds, coughs, allergies, digestive discomfort, muscle pain, and minor injuries. Examples of these are Tylenol, ibuprofen, Alka-Seltzer, and Pepto-Bismol.

The MoHW is currently engaged in a public education campaign to assist Belizeans to better understand the differences between prescription medicines and OTC medicines, and how to obtain and use them safely. Pharmacists in both the public and private sectors are also available to answer questions and provide guidance.

Regarding prescription medicines, the MoHW urges patients with chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, or asthma to conduct follow-up visits with their health care provider to prevent complications of these diseases and even early death. In addition to this, contraceptives are also prescription medicines due to the need to assess the risks and benefits, and utilize the consultation for opportunistic screening, prior to initiation of one of the various forms of contraceptives available. Both chronic medications and contraceptives can be prescribed with refills, allowing patients to visit their pharmacists and obtain medication for several months with a single prescription. Medicines used to treat chronic diseases need to be monitored and may need dose adjustments to ensure optimal care.

As the MoHW continues to strengthen dispensing practices and compliance, pharmacists are encouraged to educate their patients and, where appropriate in chronic disease management, dispense the current supply while advising patients to schedule a consultation with their physician and obtain a prescription for future refills. Regular doctors' check-ups are essential to ensure that patients' conditions are properly monitored and managed.

The Ministry remains committed to working together with pharmacists and other healthcare professionals to promote safe, effective, and accessible healthcare in all communities throughout Belize.

For further information, please contact the Drug Inspectorate Unit at 880-2363 or [inspectoratemohw@health.gov.bz](mailto:inspectoratemohw@health.gov.bz).

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