



## ***MEDICAL BENEFITS BOARD OF CONTROL*** **ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **MBS alters pharmacy dispensing hours**

The Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS) will next month alter the dispensing hours for medication at its network of pharmacies. This comes about as MBS seeks to effectively marry public demand for pharmaceuticals and the capacity of the institution to safely dispense on a daily basis. MBS Pharmacies will continue to open its doors for service from 8:00am and will close at 1:00pm. All persons who would have arrived prior to 1:00pm will be served. The new MBS dispensing hours take effect Monday, 3rd June, 2013. The general public is further advised that the Main Pharmacy on Nevis Street will no longer operate on Saturdays.

On a monthly basis less than 16 of the frontline pharmacists employed by MBS (due to vacation, illness etc.) dispense medication from an average of 14,000 prescription sheets. Each prescription sheet typically varies from 1 to 18 drugs and each beneficiary is allowed to fill a maximum of four (4) prescriptions at any one time. Exacerbating the severity of the dispensing challenge is the average service time - the time it takes to dispense the medication - of 11 to 15 minutes per person multiplied by an average of 229 sheets of prescriptions, which is tantamount to 229 individuals per day, per statistics from one pharmacy. This is coupled with in excess of 41 hours of work for pharmacists each week. Further, MBS fills scores of prescriptions for inmates at Her Majesty's Prison, Clearvue Hospital, Fiennes Institute and several Nursing Homes. Also, MBS dispenses to Mount St. John's Medical Centre critical cancer fighting agents for the treatment of its beneficiaries. During the dispensing process, occasionally, pharmacists have to contact the prescribing doctor for clarification or discussion on the prescribed medication as well as having to counsel patients. To this end, these realities significantly impact the prescription dispensing process as well as the waiting period for beneficiaries.

Urgently, MBS continues to grapple with the limited availability of pharmacists in its effort to effectively handle the ever increasing demand for medication for chronic diseases. In this regard, the organization has tried to recruit pharmacists as far as India and from Cuba with no success. To this end, it is anticipated that the persistent and concerted efforts to recruit pharmacists within CARICOM will bear fruit, and enable some readjustment to the pharmacy dispensing hours over the next few months.

In the meantime, MBS is encouraging affected beneficiaries, particularly those unable to wait while their medication is being dispensed, to utilise the Drop-off-Service at the Main Pharmacy on Nevis Street. The Drop-Off-Service operates daily from 8:00am to 12:00pm and medications can be picked-up the next day or 24 hours later. MBS hopes to offer a drop-off-service at the Clarehall and Browne's Avenue Satellite pharmacies once the new facilities have been opened to the public.

The recent commissioning of the Queue Management System at the MBS network of pharmacies addresses the issue of effectively determining the next person in line to be served, while the new dispensing software addresses issues of inventory management, transparency, fraud control and safety standards.