

New clinic opens for patients in Northern Health to have penicillin allergy assessed

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Supported by Dr. Tiffany Wong at BC Children's Hospital, Drs. Sharla Olsen and Irina Sainchuk, along with the Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) Program Coordinator Lead Pharmacist and hospital pharmacy services, have opened a new Penicillin Allergy De-Labeling Clinic at the University Hospital of Northern BC. The Specialist Services Committee, Northern Health and the Provincial Health Services Authority are supporting the project team to assess and de-label patients with a penicillin allergy label through the Spreading Quality Improvement initiative.

"There is robust evidence to indicate that penicillin allergy labels are associated with less effective, more expensive therapy with increased risk of adverse effects and antimicrobial resistance when alternative medications are used," says Dr. Wong. Data from BC Children's Hospital found, 91 per cent of 104 "penicillin allergic" patients assessed between July 2016 and May 2018 were found to be incorrectly labelled. The data demonstrates that de-labelling programs effectively and safely remove penicillin allergy labels, including pediatric, obstetric, and immunocompromised patients. Consistent with current literature, most patients with a penicillin allergy label are not allergic.

Patients across the Northern Health region do not have access to a local allergist and are impacted by substantial travel costs to access this level of care. "The development of the Penicillin Allergy De-Labeling Clinic at UHNBC provides a unique opportunity for patients with a penicillin allergy label to be safely assessed and ensures the population of the North has access to equitable care" says Alicia Rahier, AMS Lead Pharmacist.

The clinic at UHNBC has received 65 referrals since it opened in early 2023. To date, the team has successfully de-labelled 15 patients, 13 of which were seen in clinic and two of those were assessed and de-labeled over the phone. The AMS Lead Pharmacist conducts patient interviews for all incoming referrals and has 36 people waiting to be scheduled for upcoming clinics.

The clinic is currently operating on a monthly basis but will soon increase to bi-weekly with a goal of weekly clinics. If you're a patient who would like to have their penicillin allergy assessed, please contact your healthcare provider, and ask to be referred to the UHNBC Penicillin Allergy De-Labeling Clinic. If you're a healthcare provider, refer to Penicillin Allergy De-Labeling Clinic Referral Form Northern Health Document Source #11-021-5028.

If you have any questions about the clinic or to learn more, contact Heather Gummow, Spreading Quality Improvement Lead at heather.gummow@northernhealth.ca