Pharmacists have a central role in protecting the supply of critical medications at all times, and especially during a public health emergency. The public needs you to use this role now to intervene in a serious matter.
There is a concern that medications such as antiretrovirals, antimalarials and bronchodilators are being inappropriately prescribed in the community to prevent and/or treat possible COVID-19 illness. We recognize that you are faced with unprecedented challenges but we must rely on you and your actions on the front line to protect the supply of these medications for patients who critically need them, including those with HIV/AIDS, rheumatic musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) and pulmonary disorders.

Measures in other jurisdictions have included prohibiting the dispensing of chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine for either presumptive positive patients or prophylactic use related to COVID-19, limiting initiation of therapy for these drugs to infectious disease specialists and subsequently limiting amounts to 14-day supplies with no refills permitted.

There have been reports of efficacy of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine in inhibiting SARS Cov-2 viral replication (in vitro), and anecdotal reports of efficacy in patients with infection (in China), though there have been NO Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT), to date, to prove efficacy.

In the New Brunswick rheumatology community, supply should be prioritized to the following groups:

1. Pregnant women with rheumatic diseases known to be positive for the anti-Ro antibody – Hydroxychloroquine is the ONLY medications shown to reduce the incidence of neonatal lupus.
2. Patients with Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) – abrupt discontinuation of anti-malarials is associated with a significant increase in SLE flares (many requiring hospitalization).
3. Patients with other connective tissue diseases or inflammatory joint diseases.

Patients should be counselled NOT to stop their anti-rheumatic, anti-inflammatory, disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARD), or biologic medications.

We are collaborating with the New Brunswick College of Physicians and Surgeons and Medical Society to support you in managing this situation. Our efforts are promising but complete elimination of inappropriate prescribing is unlikely, therefore we trust in your value-based decisions to help ensure appropriate dispensing of all drugs in this declared state of emergency.