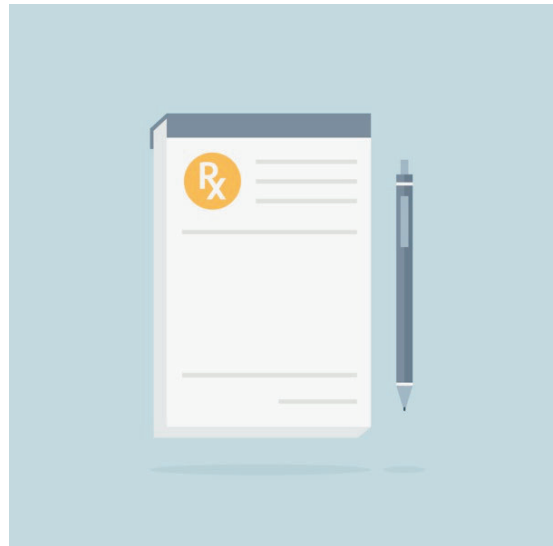


# Legal Prescribers

**M**EDICATION can be an important part of any treatment plan. To receive certain medications, a healthcare professional with the authority to prescribe must write an order for that medication. Often your primary care doctor is the professional who would write your prescription. Prescribers include medical doctors (MDs), doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs), doctors of dentistry (DDSs), advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and others.



## Objective:



Summarize legal prescribers and the prescription types each typically writes.

## Key Terms:



advanced practice  
registered nurse  
(APRN)

allopathic

anesthesia

certified nurse-midwife  
(CNM)

certified registered nurse  
anesthetist (CRNA)

clinical nurse specialist  
(CNS)

controlled substance  
dentistry

doctor of optometry  
(OD)

gynecological

nurse practitioner (NP)  
oral cavity

osteopathic  
physician assistant (PA)  
postpartum  
prescribers  
prescription  
veterinary physician  
(DVM)

## Understanding Legal Prescribers

National and/or state legislation governs who can write prescriptions. **Prescribers** are healthcare professionals who are licensed to write prescriptions—people who are responsible for assessing other's health and making clinical decisions about how to manage health conditions. In the United States, physicians have the broadest authority when it comes to writing prescriptions. Prescribers are authorized to write a prescription to prepare and/or administer a remedy for a disease. A **prescription** is an instruction written by a medical practitioner that authorizes a patient to be provided a medicine or treatment.

## LEGAL PRESCRIBER DESCRIPTIONS

Prescribing rights vary based on education, title, license, etc.

### Physicians

There are two types of practicing physicians in the United States. (Naturopaths are not licensed in all states, so they are not listed.) Both are fully licensed, trained in diagnosing and treating illnesses and disorders, providing preventive care, and prescribing medication. The two types are allopathic and osteopathic.

- ♦ **Allopathic** is the treatment of disease by conventional means (i.e., with drugs having opposite effects to the symptoms). Allopathic physicians receive an M.D. or Doctor of Medicine.
- ♦ **Osteopathic** is a branch of medical practice that emphasizes the treatment of medical disorders through the manipulation and massage of the bones, joints, and muscles. These physicians receive a D.O. or a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine.



**FIGURE 1.** Both allopathic and osteopathic physicians are fully licensed physicians who practice in all areas of medicine. Physicians are trained to listen and partner with their patients to help patients get healthy and stay well.

### Dentists

**Dentistry** is a branch of medicine that studies, diagnoses, prevents, and treats diseases, disorders, and conditions of the mouth. **Oral cavity** is a phrase used for mouth. Dentists may prescribe medication to treat a condition affecting the mouth and teeth.

### Nurses

An **advanced practice registered nurse (APRN)** is a medical professional who has a master's, post-master's, or doctoral degree in a nursing specialty. Generally, an APRN practices medicine without the supervision of a physician. An APRN is prepared by education and certification



**FIGURE 2.** The mouth is a window to the body. Often cancer, anemia, and diabetes are first identified during a regular dental examination. Dentists discover everything from your bad habits to your favorite beverage simply by asking you to say “Ahh.”

to assess, diagnose, and manage patient problems; order tests; and prescribe medications. There are four categories of advanced practice nursing. A nurse practitioner is the most common type of APRN.

### Nurse Practitioner (NP)

A **nurse practitioner (NP)** is a medical professional qualified to provide a range of primary and acute healthcare services, including diagnosing and treating medical conditions.

### Clinical Nurse Specialist

A **clinical nurse specialist (CNS)** is a medical professional who typically works in a specific area of nursing (e.g., oncology, critical care, mental health, or pain management). The CNS is responsible and accountable for diagnosis and treatment of disease, illness prevention, and risk behaviors among individuals, families, groups, and communities.

### Certified Nurse-Midwife (CNM)

A **certified nurse-midwife (CNM)** is a medical professional who provides primary health services for women from adolescence throughout their lifetimes. In addition to general primary care, nurse-midwives provide **gynecological** (the medical practice dealing with the health of the female reproductive system) and family planning services. The CNM deals with pregnancy, childbirth, and **postpartum** (following childbirth) care.

### Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA)

A **certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA)** is a medical professional who is qualified to administer anesthesia. **Anesthesia** is something used for a general or local loss of feeling or awareness, typically through the use of drugs. A CRNA provides both pre- and post-anesthesia care in every setting in which anesthesia is delivered, including hospitals, outpatient surgery centers, dentist offices, and plastic surgeon's offices.

### Other Legal Prescribers

Eye doctors, physician assistants, and veterinarians can write prescriptions, too.

### Doctor of Optometry

A **doctor of optometry (OD)** is an independent primary healthcare professional for the eyes. An OD examines, diagnoses, treats, and manages diseases, injuries, and disorders of the



**FIGURE 3.** Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, whether they are NPs, CNSs, CNMs, or CRNAs, play a pivotal role in the future of healthcare. APRNs are often primary care providers and are at the forefront of providing preventive care to the public. What prescriptions can APRNs write?

visual system, the eyes, and associated structures. A doctor of optometry is licensed to prescribe medication to treat certain eye problems and diseases.

### Physician Assistant (PA)

A **physician assistant (PA)** is a healthcare professional who practices medicine as part of a healthcare team with collaborating physicians and other providers. A PA is nationally certified and state licensed to practice medicine. Responsibilities include conducting physical exams, ordering and interpreting tests, diagnosing illnesses, performing procedures, and prescribing medication.

### Veterinary Physician (DVM)

A **veterinary physician (DVM)** is a professional who practices medicine by treating disease, disorder, and injury in animals. A veterinary physician can prescribe medication for animal treatment only.



**FIGURE 4.** PAs take medical histories, examine and treat patients, make diagnoses, prescribe medications, and assist in surgery. PAs exercise considerable autonomy in diagnosing and treating patients. However, supervising physicians and state laws determine the scope of their practice.

## PRESCRIPTIONS TYPICALLY WRITTEN BY LEGAL PRESCRIBERS

Generally, certain types of doctors write the same prescription types with regularity.

### Physicians

Allopathic (MD) and osteopathic (DO) physicians have the widest range of prescriptive authority. They are authorized to prescribe all major classes of pharmaceutical products. Physicians typically prescribe medications to treat diseases and disorders affecting all body systems. For example:

- ◆ Antibiotics are frequently dispensed for infections.
- ◆ Pain relievers are frequently prescribed to relieve headaches, sore muscles, or arthritis pain. The most powerful pain relievers prescribed are narcotics, which are categorized as controlled substances. A **controlled substance** is a drug whose manufacture, possession, or use is regulated by the government and is placed in special categories called schedules according to its potential for abuse. Schedule II drugs are the most addictive, and schedule V drugs are the least addictive.

- ◆ Medications to treat diseases and disorders (e.g., high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma) all require prescriptions from physicians.
- ◆ Mental disorders (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and panic attacks) require prescriptions from physicians.

## Dentists

Dentists (DDSs) may prescribe medications and controlled substances for dental-related conditions only. Medications are prescribed to fight certain oral diseases, to prevent or treat infections, or to control pain and relieve anxiety. For example:

- ◆ Corticosteroids are anti-inflammatory drugs used to relieve the discomfort and redness of mouth and gum problems.
- ◆ Antibiotics are prescribed to reduce or temporarily eliminate bacteria associated with periodontal disease, to suppress the destruction of bone, and to reduce the pain and irritation of canker sores.
- ◆ Prescription-strength fluoride is prescribed for children whose homes have water that is not fluorinated.
- ◆ Muscle relaxants may be prescribed to reduce stress and to avoid the grinding of teeth.

## Nurses

Nurses have different rights, roles, and responsibilities based on nurse type.

### Nurse Practitioners (NPs)

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are given prescriptive authority to varying degrees across the United States. The extent of the prescriptive authority also varies by the schedule of the drug in question. NPs with full authority can prescribe all medications prescribed by a physician without any physician oversight. In most states, NPs are allowed to prescribe schedule II through schedule V controlled substances.

### Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs)

Clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) are given prescriptive authority to varying degrees across the United States. CNSs with full scope of practice can prescribe all medications prescribed by physicians without any physician oversight. In most states, they are allowed to prescribe schedule II through schedule V controlled substances.

### Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs)

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) are given prescriptive authority to varying degrees across the United States. CNMs with full authority can prescribe all medications prescribed by physicians without any physician oversight. CNMs care for women throughout their lifetime and commonly prescribe oral contraceptives, vitamins, and antibiotics. In most states, CNMs are allowed to prescribe schedule II through schedule V controlled substances.





## ON THE JOB...

### CAREER CONNECTION: Healthcare Occupations

A personal career profile is a short statement at the beginning of a résumé that presents your experience and personal strengths in a condensed form. A career profile summarizes your work, education, and other relevant experiences and appears below the résumé objective. It acts as an advertisement for all that follows on your résumé. You can get more out of the process of writing a career profile by expanding it for your own use into a tool for exploring the kind of career that would really interest you.

Visit the United States Department of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook website at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm>. Select one of the legal prescribers. After reading the information on the website, create a career profile about your prescriber. The profile should include the following information: education, special skills and qualifications, licenses, registration, or certifications required, job history, and references. By explaining who you are and your experience, your career profile helps establish you as an achiever who creates real value to an organization. Use short, precise statements that explain who you are, what abilities you offer, and what you have contributed in other roles.



**By explaining who you are and your experience, your career profile helps establish you as an achiever who creates real value to an organization. Use short, precise statements that explain who you are, what abilities you offer, and what you have contributed in other roles.**

### Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs)

Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA) are given prescriptive authority to varying degrees across the United States. About half the states allow independent prescribing in which a CRNAs can prescribe all medications, including schedule II through schedule V controlled substances prescribed by physicians without any physician oversight. The remaining states require physician collaboration or supervision to prescribe medications. CRNAs take care of patients before, during, and after surgical or obstetric procedures. In addition, they prescribe the most appropriate medication for specific types of pain management.

### Other Legal Prescribers

Eye doctors, physician assistants, and veterinarians also have prescription rights.

## Doctors of Optometry (ODs)

Doctors of optometry (ODs) are certified to prescribe and use therapeutic agents for the treatment of eye disorders. ODs have no authority to give injections. For example, common prescriptions are:

- ◆ Topical antibiotics for infections and ocular disease
- ◆ Topical and oral anti-allergy agents
- ◆ Topical anti-glaucoma agents
- ◆ Topical anti-inflammatory agents for post-surgical pain
- ◆ Oral analgesics that are not controlled substances

## Physician Assistants (PAs)

Physician assistants (PAs) can prescribe all medications prescribed by a physician. However, when PAs write prescriptions, they do so as agents of supervising physicians. In most states, a physician's name must also appear on the prescription form. PAs have authority to prescribe schedule II through schedule V controlled substances if they obtain the appropriate registration to do so.

## Veterinarians (DVMs)

Veterinarians (DVMs) can prescribe medications to treat and prevent a wide range of illnesses and conditions in animals. For example, the following are common prescriptions written by DVMs:

- ◆ Antibiotics to fight bacterial infections
- ◆ Antiparasitics to treat infections caused by roundworms, threadworms, and other types of parasites
- ◆ Corticosteroids to alleviate symptoms associated with inflammation and cancer in animals
- ◆ Pain relievers to manage the discomfort associated with arthritis as well as post-operative and injury-related pain



**FIGURE 5.** Many distinctly different types of healthcare providers offer a variety of choices in treatments. Once you find a provider, let that professional know what you expect and what he or she can expect from you.

## Summary:



Medication can be an important part of any treatment plan. To receive certain medications, a healthcare professional with the authority to prescribe must write an order for that medication. Often your primary care doctor is the professional who would write your prescription. Prescribers include medical doctors (MDs), doctors of osteopathic medicine (DOs), doctors of dentistry (DDSs), advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and others.

## Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe the responsibilities and prescribing rights of allopathic and osteopathic physicians.
2. Describe the responsibilities and prescribing rights of a dentist.
3. Differentiate between the different types of advanced practice registered nurses.
4. Describe the responsibilities and prescribing rights of an optometrist or ophthalmologist.
5. Describe the responsibilities and prescribing rights of a physician assistant.

## Expanding Your Knowledge:



Visit a local healthcare facility. Ask to interview various healthcare professionals with prescribing authority. Be prepared to ask questions related to their major duties and responsibilities. Aside from duties and responsibilities, ask about their educational background, credentials, and the types of medications they most commonly prescribe.

## Web Links:



### **American Academy of Physician Assistants**

<http://www.aapa.org>

### **Advance Practice Nurses**

<http://nursinglicensemap.com/advanced-practice-nursing/>

### **Choosing a Healthcare Provider**

<http://www.cigna.com/healthwellness/hw/medical-topics/choosing-a-health-care-provider-abk9969>