

## **MUCH-NEEDED OPIOIDS GUIDE ADDRESSES INFORMATION GAP FOR PATIENTS**

As part of a national effort to help reduce the number of Australians experiencing harm from pharmaceutical opioids, a new patient guide to managing pain and opioid medicines was released today by the NPS MedicineWise Choosing Wisely Australia initiative.

Hospital staff will be encouraged to provide the two-page patient guide on *Managing pain and opioid medicines* to people prescribed opioids as inpatients, or on discharge to raise awareness about opioids use for short-term pain, their side effects and the risks of dependence.

The guide, developed in consultation with the Queensland Clinical Senate with testing supported by the Queensland Opioid Stewardship Program and the Society of Hospital Pharmacists (SHPA), has three key elements to support people who are prescribed opioids:

- Five questions people are encouraged to ask their health professional before leaving hospital with opioids. This has been modelled on Choosing Wisely Australia's [5 questions to ask your doctor](#) resource to guide better conversations with health professionals about tests, treatments and procedures.
- Tips for taking and storing opioids at home.
- A personal pain management plan that should be developed in conjunction with a health professional.

NPS MedicineWise CEO Adj A/Prof Steve Morris said: "With statistics showing three lives are lost, 150 people are hospitalised and 14 people present to emergency departments every day due to harm caused by pharmaceutical opioids, we need to ensure more information is available to people at the point these medicines are prescribed.

"This is the first time in Australia the Choosing Wisely 5 Questions model has been used to drive conversations about a specific treatment in a format that can be distributed in hospitals, in primary care and can be accessed directly by consumers and carers," Mr Morris said.

"Ultimately, we hope to see this practical guide provided to everyone in Australia who is prescribed an opioid medicine."

Queensland Clinical Senate Chair and Emergency Physician Dr Alex Markwell said education was critical in keeping patients safe and giving them choices.

"We need to support and empower our patients and healthcare providers to discuss what care is needed based on what matters to the patient and their family," Dr Markwell said.

"This patient guide on opioid medicines is a really important step in enabling this to happen."

SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says many Australians leave hospital with more opioids than they need, which has the potential to lead to preventable harm.

"SHPA's landmark 2018 [Reducing opioid-related harm](#) report revealed opioid de-escalation plans at hospital discharge are rare and supplying opioids for patients to take home "just in case" is still common practice.

“Among its 33 recommendations, the report highlighted the need for patient-centred tools for self-assessment and management of pain and the need for consumer health organisations to educate patients regarding managing pain expectations, so we are delighted to see the release of the *Managing pain and opioid medicines* resource.

‘As medicines experts working in acute settings, hospital pharmacists play a central role as a safeguard to reduce the risk of inappropriate medicine prescription, supply and use.’

The new opioids resource has been released to coincide with a new NPS MedicineWise national education program, [Opioids, chronic pain and the bigger picture](#), which aims to equip health professionals and consumers with tools and resources to reduce the harms of opioids, while ensuring adequate pain management and quality of life for people with chronic non-cancer pain. The program includes a [Choosing Wisely Australia recommendation](#) from the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

The Dean of the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) Dr Meredith Craigie welcomed the release of the new patient guide.

“Helping medical practitioners and consumers to develop pain management plans that work is essential to achieve changes in attitudes and behaviours that will lead to safe and appropriate prescribing and use of opioids,” she said.

### **About Choosing Wisely Australia**

[Choosing Wisely Australia®](#) is an initiative of NPS MedicineWise in partnership with Australia's health professional colleges, societies and associations. The campaign is enabling clinicians, consumers and healthcare stakeholders to start important conversations about tests, treatments and procedures where evidence shows they provide no benefit, or in some cases, lead to harm.

### **Media enquiries**

- Lyndell Coutts: Choosing Wisely Communications Lead, NPS MedicineWise - 0429 050 103, [lcoutts@nps.org.au](mailto:lcoutts@nps.org.au)
- Rebecca Griffin: Queensland Clinical Senate Communications - 0413 918 691 [rebecca@theprfirm.com.au](mailto:rebecca@theprfirm.com.au)
- Nick Sharp-Paul: SHPA Head of Strategy and Communication: 0411 098 838, [nsharp-paul@shpa.org.au](mailto:nsharp-paul@shpa.org.au)
- Carolyn Jones: ANZCA Media Manager - 0408 259 369, [cjones@anzca.edu.au](mailto:cjones@anzca.edu.au)

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