

Media release

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Opioid pack sizes and patches in firing line as medicines leaders gather in Canberra

Three weeks after declaring medication safety would be Australia's next National Health Priority, Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health has confirmed three important new medication safety policy measures in opening the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA)'s 2019 Medicines Leadership Forum this morning in Canberra.

Commitments to mandate smaller pack sizes for opioids from 1 January 2020, better labelling, warnings and consumer information for opioid medicines, and restrictions on the use of fentanyl patches were announced today, correlating to recommendations made in SHPA's landmark [Reducing Opioid-related Harm](#) report, which stemmed from last year's inaugural forum.

On behalf of members and the broader profession, SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels welcomed the initiatives, aimed at reducing the risk of opioid dependency or misuse for people self-managing pain after leaving hospital.

'SHPA's [Reducing Opioid-related Harm](#) report called for support for clinicians to prescribe the smallest quantity of analgesics – including dispensing partial packs of analgesics – where this is appropriate for the needs of the patient, so we are pleased to see this is forthcoming from the Department of Health and Therapeutics Goods Administration (TGA).

'In this complex area, communication is key and we welcome moves toward clearer information on opioid labelling relating to the risk of long-term use and overdose, as well as more comprehensible Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflets.

'Fentanyl patches have been singled out as a significant factor in the United States' ongoing opioid crisis and we strongly welcome moves to limit their clinical use in Australia to cancer care, palliative care and/or exceptional circumstances.'

Ms Michaels welcomed Mr Hunt's focus on the importance of hospital pharmacists in protecting the health and recovery of patients as they receive care in hospital.

'The challenge is clear, with 650,000 medicine-related care episodes in hospitals – comprising 250,000 medicine-related hospital admissions and 400,000 potentially medicine-related presentations to emergency departments – each year in Australia.

'With the safe and quality use of medicines now a National Health Priority Area, SHPA members and committees are ready to collaborate across the profession, and with healthcare partners, to translate this commitment and intent into real improvements to patient care.'

The 2019 Medicines Leadership Forum was supported by [Amgen](#).

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for leading pharmacists and pharmacy technicians working across Australia's health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.

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