



2 July 2021

Anji Hill
Manager, System Design
Department of Health and Wellbeing
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Adelaide SA 5000
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Dear Ms Hill

RE: South Australia's draft Palliative Care Strategic Framework

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia is the national professional organisation for more than 5,000 pharmacists, pharmacists in training, pharmacy technicians and associates working across Australia's health system. SHPA convenes a Palliative Care specialty practice group for palliative care pharmacists who work in a variety of hospital and other settings providing palliative care. SHPA also produced the *Standards of Practice for Clinical Pharmacy Service*¹ and the *Standards of Practice for the Provision of Palliative Care Pharmacy Services*² which outline the entitlement of palliative care patients to levels of pharmacy care aligned with other key patient groups.

SHPA commends the South Australian government on the development of the *draft Palliative Care Strategic Framework 2021-2026* and welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on this strategic framework. Whilst access to palliative care is essential, SHPA believes that **access to palliative care pharmacy services must be included as a priority**, to ensure safe and quality access and use of medications for people with a life-limiting illness.

Palliative care pharmacists are crucial to ensuring the safe and quality care of palliative care patients across all care settings, especially with respect to management of their medicines. Patients with a life-limiting illness may be transitioning from hospitals to residential aged care facilities or community palliative care services, and vice versa, and at times may be cared for by a combination of public and private healthcare providers without sufficient communication to ensure continuity of care. These transition points are known to be a high risk for adverse medication events, including missed doses of medications and disrupted supply when patients are transferred to another setting. This population group have complex health needs and medication regimens, so missed doses and incorrect medicines place them at risk of serious complications, lack of symptom relief and re-hospitalisation. Hence, access to palliative care pharmacy services is essential to addressing Priority 3 of the *draft Palliative Care Strategic Framework 2021-2026*, enhancing collaboration and coordination of safe and appropriate palliative care.

Palliative care pharmacists are an integral part of an interdisciplinary team and optimise the outcome of symptom management through evidence-based, patient-centred medication therapy. Palliative care pharmacists educate patients, carers and fellow health professionals on the use of medications, maintain patient medication stock, follow up on patients after discharge and transitions of care, provide prescribing advice to general practitioners and create guidelines for medication use in palliative care settings.

During provision of care there is a lot a responsibility and challenges faced by carers especially when considering complex and frequently changing medication regimens and the fragmentation of care, leading



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carers to be the single coordinators for their loved ones. SHPA member feedback indicates that carers are more educated and confident about managing the patient's medicines after a comprehensive counselling session with palliative care pharmacists. These counselling sessions cover what the patient's medication regimen is, the dosage and frequency of each medication, whether they are regular or as-required medications, the side effects of each medication, and medical referral points for each medication.

SHPA's *Standards of Practice for the Provision of Palliative Care Pharmacy Services*² further describe activities consistent with good practice for the provision of pharmacy services to a palliative care unit, service, specialist clinic or hospice. They also encompass services provided to palliative care patients in general wards or being cared for on an outpatient basis or at home. Therefore, the co-design and implantation of integrated, ambulatory models of care noted in Framework Action 4, must include access to palliative care pharmacy services.

Framework Action 5 in the *draft Palliative Care Strategic Framework 2021-2026* which addresses workforce capacity, must enable discussion about the importance of access to clinical pharmacy services for palliative care. Current pharmacy services provided to palliative care patients in South Australia are mainly provided on a part-time basis and involve clinical, administrative, educational and medication supply functions.³ SHPA believes that **palliative care pharmacists should be embedded across all settings where palliative care is provided** including: hospital, hospice, ambulatory, residential aged care, within the community and for both rural and remote settings. Priority 2 of the *draft Palliative Care Strategic Framework 2021-2026* should reflect the importance of access to palliative care pharmacists and raise greater awareness of the key role they have in providing safe and effective medication services for patients in palliative care.

Hospital pharmacists play a crucial role in supporting palliative care patients across Australia each day, and frequently inform SHPA of the workforce shortages in this space. They have highlighted the need to prioritise medication management in palliative care, by improving the pharmacy workforce capacity and increasing access to clinical pharmacy services for this patient population to ensure high quality care is provided at a level that meets community expectation. The SHPA *Standards of Practice for Clinical Pharmacy Service*¹ recommends 1 FTE clinical pharmacist:25 beds (or 30 longer stay admission) based on clinical pharmacy services delivered during normal business hours. SHPA recommends that South Australia's Palliative Care Strategic Framework supports achievement of these ratios to ensure safe and effective medication management for Australians in this population group.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Jerry Yik, Head of Policy and Advocacy on yyik@shpa.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Jennifer Collins
Chair, SA/NT Branch Chair Committee

References

¹ SHPA Committee of Specialty Practice in Clinical Pharmacy. (2013). SHPA Standards of Practice for Clinical Pharmacy Services. *Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research*, 43(No. 2 Supplement), S1-69.

² SHPA Committee of Specialty Practice in Palliative Care. (2006). SHPA Standards of Practice for the Provision of Palliative Care Pharmacy Services. *Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research*, 36(4): 306-8.

³ Gilbar P, Stefaniuk K. The role of the pharmacist in palliative care: results of a survey conducted in Australia and Canada. *J Palliat Care* 2002; 18: 287-92

