

Media release

Monday 2 September 2019

SHPA welcomes action to reduce risk of harm from paracetamol poisoning

New regulations to limit the availability of paracetamol have been welcomed by the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) as new research shows a steep increase in overdoses during the past ten years.

The Therapeutics Goods Administration (TGA) has decided to upschedule paracetamol (modified release) to Schedule 3 Pharmacist Only, a move that aligns with SHPA's [October 2018 recommendations](#) and is also supported by the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) and Consumer Health Forum of Australia (CHF).

In welcoming the new regulation on behalf of members, SHPA Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says the changes will help reduce risk of harm, particularly in older Australians.

'Familiarity with paracetamol is high, but all medicines have the potential to cause harm when used inappropriately – research published today in the [Medical Journal of Australia](#) has shown a 44% increase from 2007-08 to 2016-17 in admissions to hospitals across the country for paracetamol overdoses.

'Older Australians are more likely to experience side effects from medicines, which is understandable given the frequency with which they take them, coupled with declining kidney and liver function.

'Modified release paracetamol can cause harm in people with declining hepatic function, particularly when people are taking other medicines that contain paracetamol without their knowledge, such as common cold and flu medicines available over the counter.

'This action from the TGA on paracetamol is welcome as part of ongoing system-wide focus on geriatric medicine; two-thirds of Australians aged 75 years and over take five or more medicines daily, and approximately half of all older Australians are taking a medicine that is harmful or unnecessary.'

Ms Michaels says regulation remains an important tool, when coupled with commensurate pharmacy review and counselling, to reduce the risk of medicines misuse.

'Improving medicines safety is everyone's responsibility and the increase in paracetamol overdoses has been observed by SHPA members providing care for patients in hospitals.

'Further regulatory action could be considered to improve the safer use of paracetamol, such as restricting more pack size quantities and escalating all paracetamol-containing products to Schedule 2 Pharmacy Only medicines, which would see some paracetamol products removed from supermarket shelves.'

– ends –

For more information contact:

Nick Sharp-Paul, Head of Strategy and Communication
nsharp-paul@shpa.org.au | 0411 098 838

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.

shpa.org.au |   