

MEDIA RELEASE

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Opioids for chronic pain? #NotWise

Painaustralia and ScriptWise are joining forces to support new recommendations aimed at reducing prescribing of opioids for chronic pain.

Launched today by NPS Medicinewise Choosing Wisely, the recommendations urge doctors to “not prescribe opioids for the treatment of acute or chronic pain” without conducting a thorough investigation and looking at the alternatives. The risks, they say, “may outweigh the benefits given there is also insufficient evidence on whether the pain relief provided by opioids is sustained in the long term”.

Between 1992 and 2012, opioid dispensing increased 15-fold (500,000 to 7.5 million) and the corresponding cost to the Australian Government increased 32-fold (\$8.5 million to \$271 million), while opioid-related harms, hospitalisations and accidental deaths also increased.¹

The latest general practice data shows that an opioid is prescribed for three in four cases (72%) of multisite pain management.² The rate of opioid prescribing for chronic non-cancer pain is a major contributing factor – despite evidence of ineffectiveness for long-term pain. There is also a significant risk of abuse, dependence and overdose.

“There is a misunderstanding that opioids are a solution to chronic pain. We need to ensure better awareness and provide more effective support to people with chronic pain if we are to reduce misuse of opioid medication in Australia. Dependence and unwanted side-effects can have a devastating impact on people’s lives,” says Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett.

“Lack of referral options and insufficient specialist pain services have contributed to this problem. We now urgently need a national, coordinated approach to providing best-practice multidisciplinary care in a timely manner.”

ScriptWise CEO Bee Mohamed says the conversation needs to change, ***“The conversation needs to be around supporting patients in managing their pain without opioid painkillers as the first option. The number of fatalities relating to opioid painkillers has been on the rise in Australia, and it is clear that more needs to be done so that that patients are well-aware of the potential devastating consequences of these medications.”***

Simply telling doctors to stop prescribing opioids, however, is not enough. Painaustralia and ScriptWise are calling for:

- a public awareness and education campaign for consumers;
- better education for doctors and other health professionals;
- improved access to specialist pain services (especially in regional and remote Australia);
- improved access to affordable specialised allied health services; and
- clear pathways for referral in the primary health care setting.

Painaustralia media: Linda Baraciolli 0404 931 031

ScriptWise media: Lara Beissbarth 0425 872 744

More information: www.painaustralia.org.au
www.scriptwise.org.au
www.choosingwisely.org.au/recommendations

Media Talent

- Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett
- ScriptWise CEO Bee Ismail
- Consumers

Background

Opioids can be effectively used to treat acute or cancer pain, but there is increasing evidence that they are being over-prescribed for people experiencing chronic pain of an ongoing nature. Governments around the world are looking at ways to minimise access to opioids.

In Australia, the establishment of a national real-time monitoring system will provide a real opportunity to identify those at risk of dependence and enable better support to be provided.

The latest general practice data shows that an opioid was prescribed in three in four (72.7%) occasions of general multisite pain management.

One in 10 Australians aged over 14 has misused prescription pain-relievers or opioid medicines, possibly unaware that mixing painkillers with alcohol or other drugs can have unpredictable results and cause accidental death.

Although chronic pain is difficult to treat and may be lifelong, evidence shows that multidisciplinary pain management is the most effective approach for minimising the impact of pain, improving function and quality of life, and avoiding or minimising reliance on painkillers.

Painaustralia

As the peak national body, Painaustralia brings together consumers, medical specialists, pharmacists, academics, carers, pharmaceutical companies, allied health professionals and others with an interest in pain. Painaustralia brings all the key players together and provides one central point for balanced information and policies.

The organisation was born of the National Pain Strategy and our primary mission is to improve the quality of life for people with pain and their families and minimise the burden of pain on individuals and the community. Effectively tackling pain – a complex physical, psychological and environmental condition – is in the interest of every Australian.

ScriptWise

ScriptWise is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to reducing prescription medication misuse and overdose fatalities in Australia. We formed in 2014 to amplify the voices of the alarming number of families and individuals affected by prescription medication overdose and addiction.

We work with our partners and those personally affected to help increase health literacy and to advocate for essential health interventions to ensure Australians can achieve a better quality of life. Please visit our website to find out more: <http://www.scriptwise.org.au/>

¹ Blanch B, Pearson S and Haber PS An overview of the patterns of prescription opioid use, costs and related harms in Australia *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 24 June 2014

² Harrison CM et al. Opioid prescribing in Australian general practice, *Medical Journal of Australia* 2012 196(6):380-381