

Managing Drug Seeking Behaviour in a General Practice

Across our community, the misuse of prescription drugs is causing increasing harm, including deaths from overdose. Two of the most common drug groups being misused are benzodiazepines and opioids.

Potential drug seeking behaviour

To help manage potential drug seeking behaviour, practice staff should take note of patients who:

- visit after regular hours or request an appointment at the end of the day
- mention they are travelling through the area or visiting friends or relatives
- bring old clinical reports or X-rays
- refuse requests for past records, physical examinations or diagnostic tests
- have an unusual knowledge of opioid or benzodiazepine medications
- mention they have lost their prescription or forgotten to pack their medication
- claim their medication was stolen or damaged
- refuse other therapeutic options.

Practice policy and procedures

General practices have a responsibility to continuously improve patient care and encourage the safe use of prescription drugs. As a result, practices should:

- develop a policy on prescribing drugs of dependence and ensure that staff implement it
- display signs in the waiting room stating that the practice has a policy of not prescribing drugs of dependence to new patients
- impose conditions on registrars when they are prescribing drugs of dependence, such as requiring input from their supervisor
- display the phone number for the Prescription Shopping Information Service: 1800 631 181
- display the phone number for the Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service: (08) 6553 0520
- display the phone number for the Medicines and Poisons Regulation Branch: (08) 9222 6883
- promote the free, confidential Alcohol and Drug Support Line: (08) 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024
- ensure the universal precautions approach is used for all patients with chronic pain
- implement strategies to ensure the occupational health and safety of general practitioners and the other members of the practice team.

Staff training and safety

General practices can help reduce the number of inappropriate medication requests by:

- training staff to identify patients who are displaying potential drug seeking behaviour
- developing a scripted response for staff when responding to requests for drugs of dependence
- training receptionists to explain to new patients that the doctor will conduct a detailed assessment and may need additional information from their previous doctor prior to prescribing medicines
- asking new patients to provide photo ID, such as a driver's licence, with their Medicare card so the receptionist can check that the names match
- ensuring staff safety by adopting a zero tolerance approach to violence towards the practice team.

Prescription Shopping Programme (PSP)

To help registered prescribers make informed prescribing decisions, they can check the prescription history of patients who meet certain criteria via the [Prescription Shopping Programme \(PSP\)](#).

A patient will meet the PSP criteria if, within any three month period, they have been supplied with:

- any Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) items prescribed by six or more different prescribers
- a total of 25 or more PBS target items
- a total of 50 or more items, including target and non-target PBS items.

Registered prescribers can find out if a patient meets the PSP criteria by calling the Prescription Shopping Information Service (PSIS) on 1800 631 181. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

HealthPathways links

For more information about addressing fraudulent access to medicines and prescribing Schedule 8 medicines, refer to the HealthPathways links below:

- [Fraudulent Access to Medicines](#)
- [Prescribing Schedule 8 Medicines](#)

If you require log on details for HealthPathways, email the team at healthpathways@wapha.org.au

References and helpful links

- [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice, Part A - Clinical Governance Framework](#)
- [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice, Part B - Benzodiazepines](#)
- [Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice, Part C - Opioids](#)
- [The Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service](#)

Whilst all care has been taken in preparing this document, this information is a guide only and subject to change without notice.

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