



Community pharmacy and pharmacotherapy treatment

The community pharmacy network is a recognised contributor to Australia's harm minimisation efforts. This is evidenced in NSW, through the involvement of over 700 community pharmacies in the dispensing of opioid substitution treatments, and over 500 active participants in the Pharmacy Needle and Syringe Program.

The easily accessible nature of the community pharmacy sector has been recognised as a critical factor in supporting an increased and effective reach of patient access to pharmacotherapy. Furthermore, community pharmacies have been acknowledged by pharmacotherapy clients as "normal environments" for where they are able to receive their doses.



Pharmacists, as medication experts, are well equipped to contribute their professional expertise in providing pharmacotherapy services to their communities. However, in a recent practice alert published by Pharmaceutical Defence Limited (PDL), it was

highlighted that familiarity, frequency, complacency and criminality are all contributing factors in S8 dispensing incidents. Methadone and buprenorphine are both Schedule 8 medications, and a few points from the PDL Practice Alert are provided below for review and reflection.

- Methadone prescribing typically indicates the dose in milligrams however errors occur when this dose is incorrectly translated to mL, thereby providing a dose five times greater than intended;
- Suboxone errors can occur as prescribed doses often involve a combination of 2mg and 8mg films. Confusion due to similarity of packaging, multiple of films required, and the supply of the incorrect strength of the film e.g. 8mg film instead of a 2mg film and vice versa, can lead to under or over dosing

The potential risk for significant consequences to patients, pharmacists, and others is recognised as there continues to be an expansion in the range of Schedule 8 products, and the increasing number of prescriptions being issued for these medicines.

PDL is available to assist you in minimising harm and professional risk if you are involved in an incident such as a dispensing error. Call 1300 854 838 for 24/7 incident support and advice or visit www.pdl.org.au.

References

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017) *National opioid pharmacotherapy statistics (NOPSAD) 2016* Date of Access: 19th October 2017

PDL Practice Alert (August 2017) *Familiarity, Frequency, Complacency, Criminality – All factors in S8 dispensing incidents*

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