



Communiqué

28 April 2016

The Victorian Pharmacy Authority (the "Authority") met on 12 April 2016 at the Authority offices.

This communiqué contains a reminder to pharmacists and pharmacy owners about the availability of the Pharmacists' Support Service, further information for pharmacists about electronic drug registers and a summary of recent Panel Hearings.

Mental Health First Aid training for VPA members and staff

Members and staff of the Authority recently undertook training provided by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Australia. The training included face to face and online components.

The Authority recognises the importance of increasing awareness of mental health issues, offering assistance to individuals who may be experiencing a mental illness, and keeping people safe in a crisis situation. Authority members and officers including inspectors and administrative staff participated in the training.

Both the face to face session and the online component of the training, plus the MHFA Australia manual are useful resources for all pharmacists and I urge all to consider this training.

Pharmacists' Support Service

The Pharmacists' Support Service (PSS) is available to all Australian pharmacists, pharmacy interns and students every day of the year between 8.00 am and 11.00 pm by telephone on 1300 244 910.

The service is provided by volunteer pharmacists and retired pharmacists who are trained to provide a listening ear and crisis support over the phone. The volunteers are also equipped to signpost callers to other appropriate organisations and services when necessary. The support offered is non-judgmental and callers are encouraged to remain anonymous so that they can talk freely about their situation without fear of being identified. The service is confidential unless someone is at risk of serious harm.

More information about PSS is available on the website at www.supportforpharmacists.org.au.

Electronic Schedule 8 registers

The March 2016 Circular discussed problems associated with the recording of "owing" Schedule 8 prescriptions using an electronic register. An "owing" S8 supply may arise if a prescriber has ordered the drug verbally with the actual written prescription to follow.

Following publication of the Circular, Methsof Pty Ltd, the producer of the commercial electronic register "DD-book", has advised that its program does have a facility for managing "owing" S8 prescriptions.

Another complication arises with partial supplies. The same software program also accommodates this situation. It should also be noted that negative balances are not permitted in manual S8 registers. The appropriate entry would be a partial supply (resulting in multiple entries for a single dispensing).

The important message is that all pharmacists who are working with an electronic register are thoroughly conversant with its operation and capabilities.

The Authority understands that at least one vendor is in the process of creating video tutorials on the operation of its program, in addition to an incorporated user guide.

As stated in the Circular, the register must accurately reflect the actual quantities supplied and balance remaining at the time.

The Authority is also aware of recent reports of a significant number of pharmacists losing electronic register records due to ransomware such as CryptoVirus. Notifiers have commonly reported being able to recover or recreate dispensing records, but not being able to recover electronic registers because they had not backed-up the data in accordance with the software supplier's recommendations.

Pharmacists are strongly encouraged to seek specific advice from software suppliers to ensure existing backup processes are adequate. The Authority understands recommended processes include daily backups and provision for separate offsite storage and multiple backup sets.

Ensuring adequate storage of Schedule 8 poisons

It is increasingly evident that pharmacists really do need to continually review the volume of S8 drugs dispensed by the pharmacy, the stock levels maintained and the storage capacity available within compliant S8 poisons safes. If storage capacity is not adequate then arrangements must be made to purchase an additional or larger safe.

Panel Hearings

During March, five Panel Hearings were held into allegations that licensees had failed to meet their responsibilities.

In all cases the proprietors were found to have failed to comply with drugs and poisons legislation and good pharmacy practice because they did not ensure that records of transactions in Schedule 8 poisons showed the true and accurate balance of each Schedule 8 poison remaining in their possession after each transaction. In most cases there was predictably also a failure to record transactions in Schedule 8 poisons as soon as practicable after each transaction.

In two cases, Schedule 8 poisons were not stored in a compliant Schedule 8 poisons safe, and in one of these a large quantity of Schedule 8 poisons were stored in an unlocked drawer.

Other deficiencies considered across these hearings included the following:

- Failure to maintain adequate security alarm coverage of all areas where scheduled poisons are stored
- Failure to ensure filling of dose administration aids is carried out only by pharmacists or suitably trained pharmacy students, interns or dispensary assistants
- Failure to ensure that the identity of dispensed medicines and the identity of those clients cannot be known by another person present at the pharmacy
- Failure to provide opaque privacy screens at prescription reception and counselling points
- Failure to monitor the vaccine refrigerator with a continuously reading thermometer with a sensor (data logger)
- Failure to provide sufficient pharmacist staff to meet the expected dispensing workload.

All proprietors were reprimanded.

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Chair