

Drugs and poisons unit newsletter

November 2003



Pharmacotherapy support: Are you missing out?

As part of the Victorian Government Drug Initiative (VGDI) the Pharmacotherapy Support Program, was established across Victoria. Initially it was a one-year pilot program but has now been extended until June 2004 until an evaluation is undertaken. Under the program the Victorian Government pays \$35 plus GST per week to pharmacies for the professional services they provide in dispensing pharmacotherapies (methadone and buprenorphine), to pharmacotherapy clients who are under 19 and Juvenile Justice clients covered by a community based order. This program has been funded for a further 12-month period to 30 June 2004, while an evaluation is conducted. The Government implemented the Pharmacotherapy Support Program with the aim of reducing the financial barrier to heroin-dependent people under 19 years old and those covered by a Community Juvenile Justice order, to beginning and being retained in, pharmacotherapy treatment.

Pharmacies with eligible clients will be contacted by the Drugs and Poisons Unit regarding the support available. They then need to invoice the Department for the number of days the client is dosed while eligible for support. This invoice is processed by the DPU and then payment is authorised. Pharmacy invoices are processed regularly to ensure prompt payment.

To ensure eligible clients are recognised, it is vital that prescribers complete permit forms accurately and notify the Department of pharmacy changes. Pharmacists are required to send invoices regularly to enable prompt payment. If pharmacists charge the eligible clients instead of invoicing the Department these clients may not be able to remain on programs because they cannot afford it. It is important to keep young people in treatment and this is a positive initiative to ensure pharmacies are paid regularly and promptly. We encourage pharmacists to participate fully.

Christmas closures

Doctors and pharmacists please remind any pharmacotherapy clients that requests for interstate transfers for the Christmas holiday period will close at the end of November. This means that any trips will need to be planned well in advance if treatment is to be continued while interstate.

To have take-away doses authorised over the Christmas period, clients will need to be stable for two months. It is vital that pharmacists contact prescribers to advise if clients are not picking up regularly to avoid any problems over this time. Prescribers should check with pharmacies to ensure their clients are stable, prior to applying to the Department for approval of take-aways.

Please place the attached sign in a prominent position to alert your clients to the Christmas closure. A sheet of handouts is included for you to give to clients.

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Drugs and Poisons Unit Newsletter informing doctors, pharmacists and other parties interested in the Victorian Pharmacotherapy Program. In this issue we have included information about take-away policy, the dispensing support program for under 19 year olds, methadone pumps and many other topics of interest. If you have any comments or topics you would like discussed, please contact Barbara Taylor on 0407 911 953 or at barbara.taylor@dhs.vic.gov.au

Janet Morey has been the contact for the Drugs and Poisons Unit Newsletter. Happily, Janet will be on maternity leave from 19 December 2003, so Barbara and Tamara Furey will be the contacts from this time.

Keith Moyle
Manager, Drugs and Poisons

The Staff of the Drugs and Poisons Unit would like to wish all of our friends a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and safe New Year.

Brochure to inform Vietnamese speaking parents about the Victorian Pharmacotherapy program

Following widespread consultation, the Drugs and Poisons Unit has prepared a simple document in Vietnamese to explain the Opiate Substitution Pharmacotherapy Program being run in Victoria. There are problems unique to the Vietnamese community that this brochure seeks to address. Many parents are pressured to send sons and daughters back to Vietnam to withdraw. Often when they get there they find drugs are easily obtained but clean fits are not. Consequently, they may come back to Australia with Hep C and HIV AIDS. The brochure demonstrates the success of the pharmacotherapy program and explains how it works and what to do to get started. It takes the stance that heroin dependence is a chronic condition and methadone and buprenorphine are appropriate medications for what can often be long term treatment.

Brochures are available by contacting the Drugs and Poisons Unit on 1300 364 545.

It is also available on www.drugs.vic.gov.au under resources.

New pharmacy list

We are pleased to advise that the following pharmacies are now approved to dispense both methadone and buprenorphine to clients.

Kelly's Pharmacy

BEECHWORTH ph: 5728 1094

Nunan & Sobey Heaths Road Pharmacy.

WERRIBEE ph: 03 9748 8198

Trafalgar Pharmacy

TRAFALGAR ph: 5633 1155

Box Hill Pharmacist Advice Friendly Society

BOX HILL ph: 9890 1111

McCasker's Amcal Pharmacy

KERANG ph: 5452 1010

Rowville Lakes Pharmacy

ROWVILLE ph: 9764 1133

Kofoed's Pharmacy

NEWPORT ph: 9391 1570

Wendouree UFS Pharmacy

WENDOUREE ph: 5339 6933

Rob Ebbott Amcal Pharmacy

SHEPPARTON ph/Fax: 5821 0580

Edwards & Beecroft Pharmacy

WANTIRNA ph: 9729 5888

John Grogan Pharmacy

NUNAWADING ph: 9873 8383

Neerim South Pharmacy

NEERIM SOUTH ph: 5628 1203

Pharmacy on Collins

MELBOURNE ph: 9600 0294

Wandong Pharmacy

WANDONG ph: 57871010

Please note that pharmacies that are not open seven days per week may only take stable patients

What the doctors had to say

During April and May, Pharmacotherapy Officers visited a number of prescribers who together look after the majority of pharmacotherapy clients.

The aim of the visits was to discuss any issues that were of concern either in the Drugs and Poisons Unit or to the doctors themselves. Following consultation and discussion it is hoped that there is a better understanding of the Guidelines.

Issues pertaining to permits and ways to assist the doctors were discussed. We provided each prescriber with a list of the clients for whom they presently held permits. They were then able to check that they held permits for patients they were treating and send in termination forms if patients were not currently in treatment.

The importance of communication between service providers was stressed to reinforce the need to protect a population of clients that may not always be fully aware of the risks involved when taking and/or combining their medication.

A number of issues were raised by the doctors.

These included:

Support for new prescribers – most of the doctors visited would be happy to support and mentor newly authorised prescribers.

Lack of communication from pharmacies was prevalent– most prescribers would prefer a pharmacist to fax them to inform of any client's poor attendance or worrying behaviour. A fax can be placed in a patient record for action whereas a phone message may be misplaced.

There are concerns about diversion of buprenorphine – many were aware of pharmacies not crushing buprenorphine and also giving buprenorphine still in the blister pack despite efforts to educate pharmacists. Any dispensing sites mentioned have been approached about compliance.

Termination forms

The July 2003 census indicated that 8685 pharmacotherapy clients were being dosed on 1 July in Victoria. At the same point in time 14128 pharmacotherapy permits were active in the Drugs and Poisons Unit database.

This indicates that 38.95% of permits are for clients not currently undergoing treatment. If you think you may have permits for clients you are no longer treating please send in termination forms. The Drugs and Poisons Unit will be happy to provide a current list of any permits you may hold and also to provide termination forms to assist you to comply.

Take-Away Policy for Pharmacotherapy Clients

During a recent survey of prescribers it was seen that there is still some confusion regarding take-away policy. The Victorian Guidelines are clarified below.

- All take-away doses must be authorised by the prescriber after assessment against criteria in the program guidelines.
- A client should be stable on a program for two months before any take-away doses are authorised. Pharmacists should confirm that client behaviour is such that take away-doses are appropriate.
- A client may be given one take-away dose of methadone per week at the normal dose without approval from Drugs and Poisons Unit.
- In exceptional circumstances, take-away doses for up to three consecutive days may be authorised no more than once per month without obtaining approval. Exceptional circumstances include court appearances, illness restricting mobility, travel and employment responsibilities.
- If a client is to be given two or more take-away doses of methadone per week then a permit must be obtained from the Drugs and Poisons Unit.
- Take-away doses must not be given if there is concern that they may be misused or diverted.
- All take away doses must be adequately labelled and packaged to ensure safety. This includes using child-resistant caps on containers.
- Labelling should include:
Methadone liquid
This bottle contains a single daily dose of methadone to be taken on 15 January 2004 by Mr John Citizen

Pharmacy details

Date of supply and /or prescription number

This medication may cause drowsiness and may increase the effects of alcohol. If affected do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery. Keep out of reach of children.

May cause death or serious injury if taken by another person.

- There is no provision in the Victorian Guidelines for routine take-away doses of buprenorphine. The use of alternate day dosing will often obviate the necessity for take-away doses.
- If a client wants more than four consecutive take-away doses of methadone it is suggested that an alternative pharmacy be used for dosing on those days.
- At least two doses per week should be consumed under direct supervision.
- Methadone take-away doses must be diluted to 200 ml with cordial or fruit juice.
- Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre Inc is currently evaluating Victorian take-away policy. Information will be available in the near future.

Good News !

A young Melbourne man who was dependent on heroin decided to try to make changes in his life and began on a pharmacotherapy program at the Western Region Community Health Service. Following discussion with his outreach worker, he was persuaded to apply for an apprenticeship in an area he thought he could only dream about. He was successful in his application and is now learning his trade and really enjoying his life. His brother has now begun a program because he wants to be as happy with his life as his brother.

Do you need Interstate Transfer Numbers for the holiday season?

NSW:	02 9879 5246 02 9879 5239
ACT:	02 6244 2591 02 6205 1000
QLD:	07 3896 3900
SA:	08 8226 7166
WA:	08 9388 4980 08 9219 1919
TAS:	03 6233 2064

Would permits in computer software make life simpler?

It has been suggested on many occasions that having the pharmacotherapy permits and other Drugs and Poisons Unit (DPU) forms incorporated into medical software packages such as Medical Director would make life much simpler for prescribers. DPU forms have been formatted into electronic form and we have asked for them to be included in updates.

Prescribers lobbying to the suppliers of these packages should assist in bringing about a quicker result.

Trubor Methadone Pumps

Trubor Glass Instruments has advised the Drugs and Poisons Unit that their glass methadone pumps are no longer available.

Recently it was drawn to our attention that some pumps were reassembled incorrectly following cleaning. The volume adjustment slide was replaced upside down and incorrect volumes were dispensed. Newer models have large arrows on the adjustment slides and Trubor have supplied permanent vinyl labels with large arrows to indicate correct alignment for models that don't have the arrow. Therapeutic Goods Administration has been in consultation with Trubor during this process. Alternative dispensing pumps are still available from:

Medos Co	ph 03 9562 6888
Interpath	ph 03 9457 6277

Patient Information

Following a recent inquest into a methadone related death a coroner recommended "licensed methadone prescribers be required to supply suitable written material to their patient, and if possible the patients family, outlining all the issues associated with methadone treatment".

The Drugs and Poisons Unit has a number of items that doctors and pharmacists should give to their patients to enhance the safety of their program. These include:

"Starting Methadone or Buprenorphine." Tear-off pads of 50 pages for clients commencing on a pharmacotherapy program. The pads are designed to inform patients about these medications and particularly about the risks early in treatment, of overdosing by combining different drugs and drugs and alcohol. Patients, friends and family are advised how to recognise overdose and advised to never leave a patient to sleep off a suspected overdose but to call an ambulance immediately. Doctors, pharmacists and treatment agencies should use these pads.

"The Methadone Users' Booklet" provides greater detail for patients on methadone. Doctors should give these to clients when they commence treatment.

Buprenorphine users' booklets are obtained through Reckitt Benckiser on fax 02 9325 4018 Please call us on 1300 364 545 or fax the attached form and we will send out any materials you require.

These numbers are for the relevant departments in each state. "Overdoses, the Law, Safer Injecting"

'Overdoses, the Law, Safer Injecting' is a wallet sized publication covering legal and health issues associated with intravenous drug use.

It includes information about police powers, drug laws, syringes and the law, syringe disposal, safe injecting and CPR information.

A preview of 'Overdoses, the Law, Safer Injecting' can be seen at

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/publications.cfm

You can order multiple copies for distribution by emailing Chris Shelley ChrisSh@vla.vic.gov.au (include your name, number of copies required and address), or phoning Chris on 9269 0223 or visiting the website above.