


Things to Think About Before You...

Prescribe Schedule 8 Drugs



Numerous careful considerations are necessary to ensure Schedule 8 medications are prescribed appropriately.

While Schedule 8 drugs, when properly prescribed and managed, are an option for certain people with chronic nonmalignant pain, there has been a concerning increase in harms related to their use.^{1,2}

Risk management strategies

Doctors need to think about the following to manage risks relating to Schedule 8 medications:

- is there a therapeutic need and is this the most appropriate medication for the patient?³
- is the patient likely to be drug dependent - are they exhibiting drug seeking behavior?
- should Medicare Australia's Prescription Shopping Information Service (PSIS) or the state or territory's poisons and drug regulation department be contacted?
- is a permit or authority necessary? What are the relevant state or territory legislative requirements for prescribing drugs of dependence?
- does the patient require specialist review?

If you do prescribe, ensure detailed notes are kept setting out your reasoning for prescribing the particular Schedule 8 medication(s) to the patient.

Recognising drug seeking behaviours

Actions such as the following are potential indicators of drug seeking:

- presenting at the end of the day,^{3,4} outside of regular consulting hours,³ or on weekends⁵
- providing a clear description of symptoms, with little in the way of any physical signs⁵
- claiming to have lost or forgotten their medication or prescription, or had their previous prescription stolen³
- saying they are from interstate or visiting friends or relatives³
- requesting a specific medication and declining any suggested alternative³
- declining to give any details of their current treating doctor(s)³
- applying pressure, e.g. by provoking pity, guilt or the sense of being threatened.³

Appropriate prescribing

Many doctors are unaware that in certain circumstances, permits or authorities must be obtained before Schedule 8 medications may be prescribed. Schedule 8 medications cannot be prescribed without a permit to patients who are known or suspected to be drug dependent.

If you intend to prescribe Schedule 8 medication(s) to patients who are not drug dependent for periods greater than eight weeks, an authority or permit must be obtained from the state or territory health department. It is also wise to check how long the patient has been prescribed the medication previously as a new permit may be required.

Inappropriate Schedule 8 prescribing may result in financial penalties, the loss of a doctor's authority to prescribe Schedule 8 drugs, or disciplinary action. Further, the Medical Board of Australia and the Medical Council of New South Wales have the power to take immediate action, e.g. suspend a doctor's registration or impose conditions. Medicare Australia regularly reviews prescribing data, looking for inappropriate prescribing by doctors.⁶

Legislation

Listed below is the legislation in each state and territory that establishes when doctors need to obtain authorisation or a permit for prescribing Schedule 8 drugs.

- ACT** *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 2008* legislation.act.gov.au/a/2008-26/default.asp
- NSW** *Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act 1966* austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/patga1966307/
- NT** *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act* austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nt/consol_act/padda296/
- QLD** *Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996* legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/H/HealDrAPOR96.pdf
- SA** *Controlled Substances Act 1984* legislation.sa.gov.au/lz/c/a/controlled%20substances%20act%201984.aspx
- TAS** *Alcohol and Drug Dependency Act 1968* austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/consol_act/aadda1968227/
- VIC** *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/dpacs1981422/
- WA** *Poisons Act 1964* austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/pa1964121/

References

1. Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Prescription Opioid Policy. Improving Management of Chronic Non-malignant Pain and Prevention of Problems Associated with Prescription Opioid Use. Sydney 2009. Available at: ranzcp.org/Files/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/Submissions/CNMP-pdf.aspx
2. Dhalla I, Persaud N, Juurlink D. Facing Up to the Prescription Opioid Crisis. *BMJ* 2011(343):d5142. Available at: bmj.com/content/343/bmj.d5729
3. NSW Health. Responsible Opioid Prescribing: Identifying and Handling Drug-seeking Patients. 2008. Available at: mcnsw.org.au/resources/755/BoardNewsDec08-PSBinsert-FINAL.pdf
4. Bird S. Prescribing Schedule 8 Drugs. *Aust Fam Physician* 2006;35:59-60. Available at: racgp.org.au/afp/200601/200601bird.pdf
5. Queensland Health Drugs of Dependence Unit. Misuse of Prescription Drugs and Intravenous Drug Use. Coorparoo: Queensland Government; 2003.
6. Department of Human Services. Practitioner Review Program. Australian Government; [updated 5 June 2015]; Available at: humanservices.gov.au/health-professionals/services/practitioner-review-program/

More information

- Contact your state or territory health department for assistance.

ACT: Pharmaceutical Services, ACT Health
T: 02 6205 0998

NSW: Pharmaceutical Services Branch, NSW Health
T: 02 9391 9944

NT: Poisons Control Unit, Department of Health
T: 08 8922 7341

QLD: Drugs of Dependence Unit, Queensland Health
T: 07 3328 9890

SA: Drugs of Dependence Unit, Drug and Alcohol Services, Department of Health
T: 1300 652 584

TAS: Pharmaceutical Services Branch, Department of Health and Human Services
T: 03 6166 0400

VIC: Drugs and Poisons Unit, Department of Health
T: 1300 364 545

WA: Drugs of Dependency Unit, Department of Health
T: 08 9222 6883

- Visit medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/pbs/prescription-shopping/index.jsp for PSIS information or call 1800 631 181.
- Read The Royal Australasian College of Physicians' *Prescription Opioid Policy*, 2009, (written for all doctors) at ranzcp.org/Files/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/Submissions/CNMP-pdf.aspx.
- Read "Misuse of Opioid Drugs" in MDA National's *Defence Update* Winter 2013 at defenceupdate.mdanational.com.au/en/Articles/misuseofopioiddrugs.
- Read *Australian Family Physician* March 2013 (racgp.org.au/afp/2013/march/) which has useful articles on prescribing drugs of dependence.
- Contact your medical indemnity insurer.

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