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Medicine safety to be the 10th National Health Priority Area

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia commends Federal, state and territory health ministers for making medicine safety the 10th National Health Priority Area and recognising the urgent need to ensure medicines improve the health of Australians, not put them at risk of harm.

“Use of medications is the most common intervention we make in health care. Medicines are meant to help us get better, not make our health worse,” Pharmaceutical Society of Australia National President A/Prof Chris Freeman said.

“As PSA’s Medicine Safety: Take Care report found 250,000 Australians are hospitalised each year and another 400,000 present to emergency departments as a result of medication errors, inappropriate use, misadventure and interactions. At least half of these problems could have been prevented.

“The annual cost of medication-related hospital admissions in Australia is nearly \$1.4 billion. This is equivalent to 15 per cent of total PBS expenditure and is money that could be much better spent.” This cost doesn’t include extra presentations to emergency departments or to general practice or community pharmacy.

“PSA applauds our state and territory health ministers and Commonwealth Health Minister, Greg Hunt on agreeing at today’s COAG Health Council meeting to make medicine safety the 10th National Health Priority Area.

“PSA commends the decision by the nation’s health ministers to commission a baseline report on quality use of medicine and medicine safety to identify the prevalence of harm and collect evidence of use and misuse of medicines.

“But it must not stop there. There needs to be meaningful commitment from all parties involved in healthcare delivery, including health professionals, peak organisations, and government to reduce harm from medicines use. PSA’s Medicine Safety: Take Care report has been the catalyst for this announcement.

“PSA commits to leading the effort on behalf of patients and pharmacists to ensure that the objective of safe and quality medicines use is realised. We look forward to working with the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Healthcare and the Australian Digital Health Agency.”

PSA believes a number of additional measures can be implemented without delay which will make a real difference to improving the health care of Australians. The 7th Community Pharmacy Agreement provides an opportunity to reduce harm from medicines use, and the significant burden that this harm has on our healthcare system

“There is also an opportunity for a focus on medicine safety to be part of the National Health Reform Agreements. Research released last week found pharmacist-led medicine charting in hospitals reduced the proportion of patients with at least one medicine problem from 66 per cent to 3.6 per cent,” A/Prof Freeman said.

“Pharmacists are medicines experts. They must to be supported to spend more time – both in the community pharmacy setting and other parts of the health care system, including aged care facilities – reviewing patients’ medications, providing advice to members of the health care team, and educating consumers about medicine safety.

“It is also time to review the National Medicine’s Policy and make sure it reflects contemporary health care needs and practices. Australia’s National Medicine Policy is now 20 years old and needs a review and refresh as previously announced by the Minister for Health.

A/Prof Chris Freeman said “If we are serious about achieving quality and safe use of medicines, three areas need to be of the highest priority. One, a comprehensive data evaluation framework needs to be developed to support the monitoring and reporting of medicines safety measures. Two, there needs to be greater awareness of medicines safety and its implications, and three, we need evidence-based interventions tested and implemented across settings to improve the health of Australians.”

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