

Call for TGA to test online drugs

Nick O'Donoghue

PHARMACEUTICAL Society of Australia (PSA) president Warwick Plunkett has called on the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to purchase and test medicines sold online.

The call came after the results of a Korean trial found counterfeit erectile dysfunction (ED) medications sold online contained potentially fatal mixtures of toxic materials.

Speaking to *Pharmacy eNews*, Mr Plunkett said the market for counterfeit drugs was relatively unknown, but suggested the TGA should be investigating the make up of drugs advertised through spam e-mail, from overseas sources.

"We get bombarded with offers for these drugs, mostly from



Canada, but also from other places too.

"The counterfeit drugs market is a big issue around the world, but we're relatively unaware of it in Australia.

"Maybe the TGA should be buying the odd product online and testing it to check the safety of these products [advertised online]," he said.

The study, presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Urological Association last month, found counterfeit drugs posed significant health risks.

Researchers noted the majority of samples tested contained excessive amounts of the active ingredient – in some cases 2.4 times the amount in Viagra or Cialis – while others had no active ingredient at all.

Of the 19 drugs tested as part of the study, 20 per cent contained mercury, while another had lead in it, with just one containing "proper active ingredients including sildenafil and tadalafil", the researchers said.

A PSA spokesman told *Pharmacy eNews* that while most Australian online pharmacies were "very reputable" he warned against purchasing from overseas web based stores.

"We say unless you're very sure of who they are don't go near them," he said.

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Price puts patients off prescriptions

Nick O'Donoghue

COST IS a factor for one-in-five Australians when it comes to buying all sorts of medications including drugs prescribed by their doctor.

National Prescribing Service manager for research and development Margaret Williamson has called for strategies to be developed to help patients make "wise choices" when the cost of medication is an issue.

In a presentation made at the National Medicines Symposium last month, Ms Williamson revealed price was a major factor for patients when it came to buying medicines, with a significant number either cutting down the dose or not purchasing

drugs recommended by health professionals.

The research, compiled through a series of questionnaires sent to Australians over the age of 50, found people from non-English speaking backgrounds were the most likely to change or not buy medicines because of price.

The findings revealed 19 per cent of people who did not speak English at home changed their prescriptions and 22 per cent did not buy over-the-counter (OTC) medicines because of costs, compared to just over nine per cent in both categories for native English speakers.

Across a range of categories including age, educational background, gender and health status, Australians were more

likely to be put off buying complementary medicines than OTC or prescription drugs, the study revealed.

Researchers also noted that almost 60 per cent of people who spend \$500 or more a month on medicine had lowered their dose or decided not to buy them because of the cost, compared with just over 10 per cent of those spending between \$400-499 a month.

Ms Williamson concluded health professionals needed to take the cost of medication into account when recommending medications to patients and also to develop systems to help consumers make informed decisions when it comes to purchasing treatments.

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FROM THE GUILD PRESIDENT - KOS SCLAVOS

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Electronic prescribing secures pharmacy ownership



THE BENEFIT of community pharmacy participating in electronic prescriptions has been well documented with reasons as diverse as improved patient safety through to community pharmacy being centred at the heart of the health system.

Let me state a key reason why I believe success with electronic prescriptions is vital in this agreement.

Electronic prescriptions through the Guild endorsed eRx Script Exchange secures pharmacy ownership and ensures community pharmacy remains in the hands of pharmacists. Allow me to explain, and I hope it motivates you to not only sign up to eRx but ensure that your pharmacy dispensing system is

active and participating in eRx.

Electronic health record

The Federal Government announced on budget night that it is spending a massive \$466.7 million to establish a person controlled health record.

The first and vital plank of that record will be electronic prescriptions.

We are all aware that \$75.5 million has been allocated in the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement via a 15c incentive payment per eligible prescription.

When the person-controlled health record becomes one of the core responsibilities for community pharmacy no government in Australia will ever allow a supermarket chain to have such valuable data in their possession. That means community pharmacy is out of their reach.

Data exchange consented to by the individual patient will decide which health professional has access to their personal health records across different parts of the system.

Research conducted by the Guild

shows that supermarkets are not trusted by the public for holding consumer records let alone the more sensitive health records.

As the health system becomes more integrated, information flow to other health professionals will increase.

That information flow is indeed what drives the health savings because more efficient communications between health professionals will reduce medication errors, reduce hospital stays and avoid re-admissions to hospital.

Effectively free system

Dispensing of electronic scripts will be effectively free for all pharmacies as a result of a new pricing policy announced by the Guild endorsed eRx Script Exchange.

The policy includes two major changes. eRx will lower its transaction fee to match the 15c incentive payment under the Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement. eRx will also exchange all electronic scripts not currently funded by the incentive scheme at no cost.

This includes private and

pharmacy initiated originals and repeats therefore ensuring that pharmacies are not out-of pocket for using e-scripts.

Your support needed now

As at the start of June over 4000 doctors are now live using eRx to transmit e-scripts. It's a little embarrassing that a smaller number of pharmacies - 2400 - are now live and using eRx to process these scripts and introducing repeat prescriptions into eRx for future processing. If you have not already registered to use eRx you can register at www.ERX.COM.AU

If you have previously registered for eRx and you are not yet operational, you should contact your software provider directly and ask for the status for your installation. eRx is currently certified and live for Fred Dispense, Minfos, LOTS, Amfac, Simple Aquarius and Pharmacy Pro dispensing software.

I seek your support in helping to secure pharmacy ownership by implementing eRx Script Exchange in your pharmacy.

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