



MEDIA RELEASE

KEEPING WATCH ON MORPHINE PRESCRIPTION

6 March 2008

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Tasmania Faculty, together with General Practice Tasmania, has welcomed calls for tougher monitoring of morphine prescription. Both groups warn that the problem is far more complex than has been publicly reported.

“The problems of high prescription levels and ‘doctor shopping’ highlighted in recent coroner’s reports are of significant concern to general practitioners,” said Dr Emil Djakic, spokesperson for the RACGP Tasmania Faculty.

“Beating doctor shopping is partly a community and doctor education issue. We are working together to ensure that Tasmanian doctors are aware of this, particularly in relation to morphine. We are also aiming to ensure that guidelines and systems around monitoring the prescription of dangerous or addictive drugs reflect the complexity of this issue. This recognises the need for timely and accurate collation of information from across various medical specialties, plus the need to consider the requirements of various state and national jurisdictions, within the constraints of current privacy legislation.

“At the same time, we need to be careful to understand the full extent of the problem and the complex social, economic and health factors impacting upon it. We need to better communicate with patients to ensure that doctors are providing the most appropriate care for their condition.

“Significant gaps in health services are currently being filled by general practitioners, the Commonwealth and State Governments must address this issue.

“People suffering from chronic pain have a legitimate need for these drugs and do not have ready access to specialist pain management clinics. They

are often waiting for extended periods to have their conditions treated. General practitioners need support in helping these patients, as well as public education in the dangers of addiction to prescribed medications.

“To address service access for patients with substance abuse problems, we are currently running an education program aimed at developing better links between doctors, alcohol and drug services, mental health services and community pharmacies so that there is a wider range of viable, alternative management options for these patients.”

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is responsible for maintaining standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice. The RACGP has the largest general practitioner membership of any medical organisation in Australia, with the majority of Australia's general practitioners belonging to their professional college. Over 23,000 general practitioners participate in the RACGP Continuing Professional Development Program. The RACGP National Rural Faculty, representing more than 5,000 members, has the largest rural general practitioner membership of any medical organisation in Australia. Visit www.racgp.org.au

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