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News

Prevention focus skips hearts 12.06.2019

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Health Minister Greg Hunt has called for "fearless ideas" to feed into the development of an Australian Preventive Health Strategy while a new study found two in three Victorian patients at risk of stroke were not supplied oral anticoagulants within 30 days of discharge.

The study, published by the Victorian Agency for Health Information, shows low rates of prescribing and dispensing of key PBS medicines for patients who experienced a heart attack or stroke and were at high risk of another.

Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) chief executive Kristin Michaels said the evidence was alarming.

"Despite the federal government's commitment to and investment in PBS medicines, two-thirds of patients are still not being provided with the best preventative medicines despite their risk of readmission after heart attacks and strokes," Michaels said.

Minister Hunt announced the new strategy at the Public Health Prevention Conference in Melbourne yesterday (Wednesday), where he also spoke about the government's investment in immunisation.

The Public Health Association of Australian (PHAA) is now calling for a national target of five per cent of Australia's health budget being allocated to prevention.

"Of course, the very best strategy is only the first step," PHAA CEO Terry Slevin said. "The real benefit only flows if action and investment follow to effectively implement a great strategy."

Slevin said the minister was "moving on a pre-election pledge to make prevention a focus".

"If we get this strategy right, future generations will benefit with a healthier and higher quality of life but also see a reduced bill when it comes to the ever-growing cost of health care," he said.

However, the SHPA said strokes and heart attacks account for a significant proportion of hospital admissions.

"Given medication treatment guidelines for strokes and acute myocardial infarctions are very well established, it is alarming this data shows many patients are not being supplied the appropriate PBS medicines after treatment for a stroke or heart attack."

Michaels said hospitals were providing patients with prescriptions that were often not getting dispensed, increasing their risk of another heart attack or stroke resulting in hospital readmission.

"According to the report, approximately two-thirds of Victorian patients at risk of stroke were not supplied oral anticoagulants within 30 days of discharge, and almost half of Victorian patients at risk of acute myocardial infarction were not supplied antiplatelet therapies within 30 days of discharge," Michaels said.

"Hospital pharmacists routinely calculate patient risk levels of cardiac and stroke events and, based on these assessments, provide advice to doctors on prescribing the most appropriate PBS medicines regimen upon discharge against evidence-based guidelines, to prevent patients from having another heart attack or another stroke."

Megan Brodie

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