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Medicinal cannabis: a national approach is necessary

With the cultivation and manufacture of medicinal cannabis becoming legal in Australia, and receiving recent media coverage, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is encouraging the development of common legislation across all states.

The CEO of SHPA, Kristin Michaels said today that an agreed Australia-wide approach to the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes is essential for ensuring public understanding of acceptable and unacceptable usage and to protect standards for medicines management.

“While there is substantial evidence for the benefits of medicinal cannabis in specific situations, the wide range of approved usage across different states of Australia sends mixed signals to the broader Australian public regarding both appropriate use and the expertise of medical authorities,” said Ms Michaels.

She said that it is important for Australians to receive clear, unambiguous messages about acceptable use of medicinal cannabis as distinct from recreational, illegal use.

“SHPA appreciates that each jurisdiction will differ slightly regarding how medicinal cannabis will be prescribed and regulated but there should be a concerted effort to at least find some common ground regarding acceptable prescribing,” Ms Michaels said.

“From March next year it will be possible to be prescribed medicinal cannabis in Queensland for illnesses including MS, cancer, HIV/AIDS and epilepsy. In NSW it will be available for adults only for ‘end of life’ illnesses. In Victoria, from 2017, it will be available for children with severe epilepsy.”

“To the general public, the mix of approaches will be confusing and will not provide reassurance regarding the general quality of the Australian health system.”

“SHPA is well positioned to support different jurisdictions to find common ground for medicinal cannabis prescribing,” she said.

“SHPA can also assist clinical trials for the use of medicinal cannabis for patients for whom our members currently provide care. These include chemotherapy patients with severe nausea and vomiting, patients with chronic pain and paediatric patients with severe epilepsy.”

“As Australia introduces agreed processes for using medicinal cannabis, it is important to provide educational support for patients and their carers. SHPA can ensure a nationally consistent approach.”

“SHPA also recommends, and can support, a national collaboration for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of medicinal cannabis usage, as part of evaluating its place in future clinical practice,” said Ms Michaels.

ENDS

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About SHPA

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national professional organisation for more than 4,500 pharmacists, pharmacists in training, pharmacy technicians and associates working across Australia’s health system. SHPA is the only professional pharmacy organisation with a core base of members practising in public and private hospitals and other health service facilities.

SHPA is committed to facilitating the safe and effective use of medicines, which is the core responsibility of pharmacists, especially in hospitals. SHPA supports pharmacists to meet medication and related service needs, so that both optimal health outcomes and economic objectives are achieved for Australians, as individuals, for the community as a whole and for healthcare facilities within our systems of healthcare.