Evidence is clear as codeine changes near

The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) has today recommitted its support for changes that will see Australians require a medical consultation before accessing codeine-containing medicines from Thursday 1 February 2018.

Last week Professor Brendon Murphy, Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer confirmed paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medications, alone or in combination, are adequate over-the-counter treatments for most types of acute pain, and that more complex acute or chronic pain requires medical input via GP consultation.

Chief Executive Kristin Michaels says SHPA has long advocated for reducing the availability of ineffective codeine-containing medicines.

‘SHPA does not recommend sub-therapeutic doses of codeine for the treatment of mild to moderate pain, a view informed by the expertise of hospital pharmacists who provide care to patients with mismanaged pain in hospitals around Australia, and people experiencing the debilitating effects of codeine and opioid dependence.

‘SHPA remains the only pharmacy organisation to join the Choosing Wisely Australia initiative curbing unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures, and our position on codeine has been one of our five Choosing Wisely recommendations since 2016.’

Ms Michaels says amid ongoing debate on codeine-containing medicines and their use, the facts remain clear.

‘Therapeutic Guidelines and other evidence show us that codeine-containing medicines – especially low-dose codeine – are not effective for ongoing chronic pain, they are addictive and can have unpredictable effects.

‘The recommendation of the Therapeutic Goods Administration to make these products prescription-only is informed by research, and aligns Australia with 25 other countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.’

Ms Michaels says SHPA stands behind the ongoing Real Relief campaign, led by Painaustralia, to help ensure more Australians become empowered in the management of their pain.

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett says Real Relief is about ensuring up-to-date information on codeine reaches as many people as possible.

‘Real Relief brings together key pharmacy, medical and consumer groups to inform Australians about the realities of codeine dependence, pathways to seeking help and alternative approaches to self-managing pain.

‘Painaustralia looks forward to partnering with organisations such as SHPA, whose members are experts in medicines management, in the potential development of a new National Pain Strategy to help ensure no Australians have to endure unnecessary pain.’
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About SHPA
The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) is the national, professional, for-purpose organisation for leading pharmacists and pharmacy technicians working across Australia’s health system, advocating for their pivotal role improving the safety and quality of medicines use. Embedded in multidisciplinary medical teams and equipped with exceptional medicines management expertise, SHPA members are progressive advocates for clinical excellence, committed to evidence-based practice and passionate about patient care.